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ABSTRACT

Good school attendance has been directly linked to academic achievement, greater participation in school programs, and graduation from high school. Reports investigating poor elementary school attendance habits describe the emergence of later problems in middle and high school years. Schools and Families: Allies for Attendance, a 2-year project, was undertaken to improve attendance among elementary school children. The project was an early identification program designed to prevent the emergence of behavioral problems, academic failure, and possible delinquency among students exhibiting a pattern of poor school attendance. This manual describes the results of the project in a question-and-answer format. Chapter 1 outlines the history and law mandating school attendance. Chapter 2 provides a description of the grant. Chapter 3 is dedicated to project evaluation and data analysis. Chapter 4 lists the most effective practices in working with school personnel, parents, and children on issues of attendance. Chapter 5 provides case examples from the project. Some of the findings reported include the observations that as few as 15 absences per year, excused and unexcused together, may place a child at risk for developing poor attendance habits; that different reasons for poor attendance may be described which in turn relate to the type of intervention needed to remedy them; and that poor attendance and poor achievement are related. (Author/NB)

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All About Attendance

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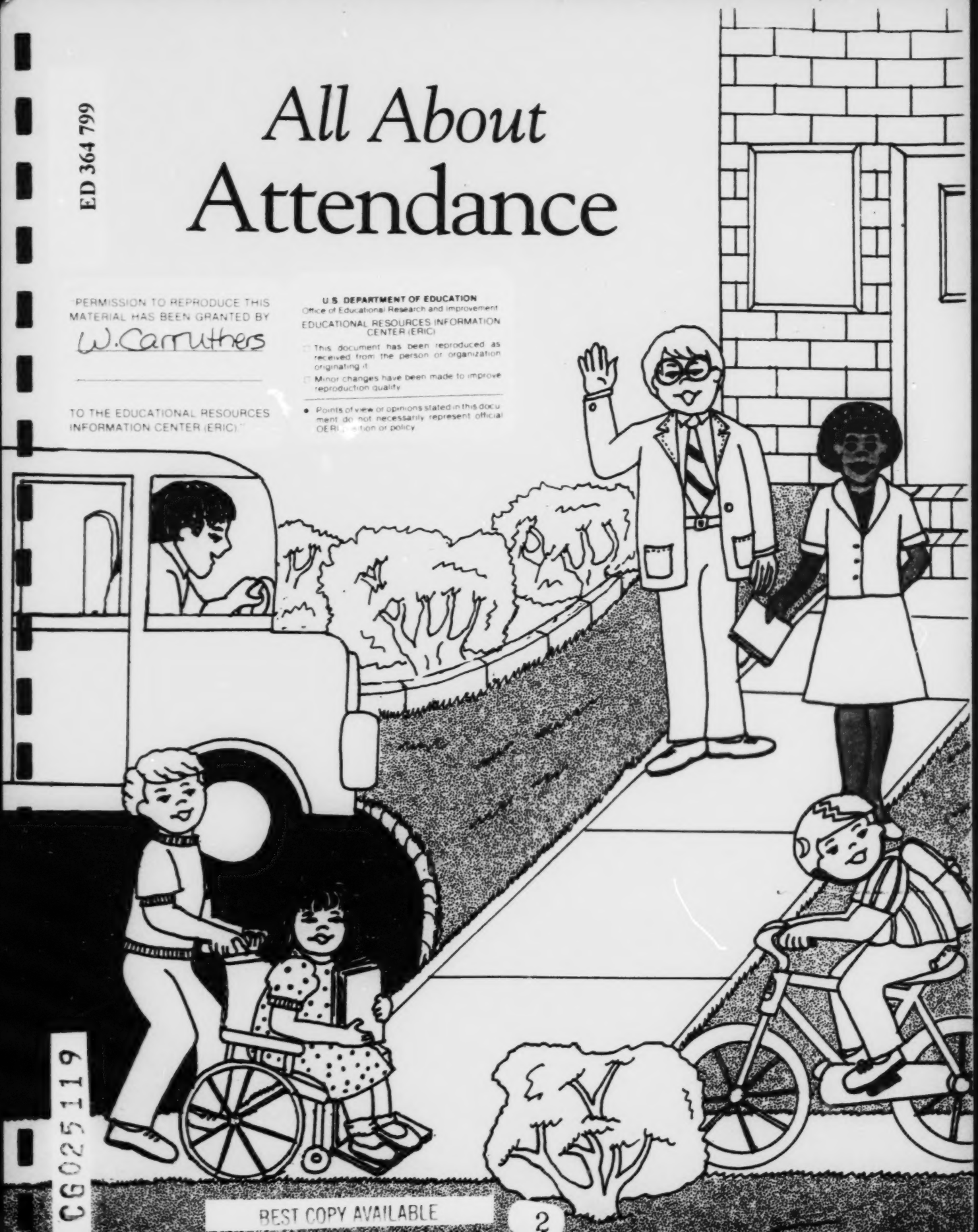

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ALL ABOUT

ATTENDANCE

ALL ABOUT ATTENDANCE

A Manual and Case Studies
for
Schools and Families
by

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and

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Wake County Government, in North Carolina, was the applicant for the grant which supported this project, and Wake County Public School System was the agency involved in implementing the project. Dr. William Carruthers was the project director. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of either Wake County Government or Wake County Public School System.

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FOREWORD

The importance of school attendance and how it relates to student success can never be underestimated. Over the last three decades, school attendance has become a major issue among policy makers, educators, and business leaders. Research studies examining the significance of school attendance as it relates to school success have been funded by national, state, and local agencies. Published reports indicate that there is a high correlation between excellent school attendance and academic success.

Good attendance has been directly linked to academic achievement, greater participation in school programs, and graduation from high school. Especially germane to this project are reports that suggest that the establishment of excellent attendance habits during the elementary years leads to higher academic achievement during the middle and high school years.

Reports investigating poor elementary school attendance habits, on the other hand, describe the emergence of later problems in the middle and high school years. Conditions such as school retention, dropping out, and delinquency often plague those students who fail to establish consistently good attendance habits during their elementary years.

This manual describes the results of a two-year project dedicated to improving attendance among elementary school children. Schools and Families: Allies for Attendance was an early identification program designed to prevent the emergence of behavioral problems, academic failure, and possible delinquency among students exhibiting a pattern of poor school attendance. As the manual will indicate, the success of any such program is dependent on the cooperative effort of school personnel, parents, and children.

All About Attendance has been designed in a question and answer format in order to provide information that was often requested by those interested in the project. Many of the questions were asked by ourselves or others interested in the project and served to guide our effort as we sought the answers. The first Chapter outlines the history and law mandating school attendance. Chapter 2 provides a

description of the grant. Chapter 3 is dedicated to project evaluation and data analysis. Chapter 4 lists the most effective practices in working with school personnel, parents, and children on issues of attendance, and Chapter 5 provides case examples.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. William "Bill" Carruthers and the guidance interns would like to thank those persons who helped in the development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of Schools and Families : Allies for Attendance . There were many individuals who were very helpful over the two years the project operated. It is not possible to recognize all of these people individually, but there are some who made significant contributions and these should be acknowledged.

Thanks are extended to Geraldine Ritter, Director of Grants, who was instrumental in helping to submit the grant applications, and to Dr. Ronald Anderson, Executive Director of Youth Services, and Dr. Linda Fitzharris, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, who enthusiastically supported grant operations. Thanks are also extended to Mike Schell of the Governor's Crime Commission and Dr. Dennis Stacey, Chief Consultant for the Pupil Personnel Services Section at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Mike Schell was the Grants Management Specialist for the project and offered those involved with the project information and support. Dr. Dennis Stacey became an advocate for the project after attending a presentation at the end of the first year of grant operations. He was subsequently instrumental in arranging presentations of the grant at two state conferences. Richard Stevens, Wake County Manager, Cam Frazier, Wake County Finance Director, and Rosena Grott in Wake County Government, are also thanked; they were always available to facilitate administration of the grant.

The 13 elementary schools involved in the grant were very enthusiastic and helpful throughout the two years of the project and thanks go to all school personnel who made the project a success. The elementary schools involved in the grant were as follows:

SCHOOL	PRINCIPAL	COUNSELOR
Baucom	Pat Cunningham	Carolyn Sink
Brentwood	Pat Andrews	Holly Tesar
Brooks	N. Eugene Adams	Linda Bennett
Bugg	Jim Fatata	Shirley Hinton
Cary	Barbara Chapman	Meliene Bawden
Douglas	Gary Gammill	JoAnne Murphy
Fox Road	Teresa Edger Abron	Veronica Hargett
Fuquay-Varina	Donald Cotton	Belinda Harris
Hunter	Cecilia Rawlins	Lynn Lyle
Lockhart	Mary Alice Wiggs	Anne Creech
Smith	Brenda Baker	Arcrena Burch
Stough	Sally Bragg	Pam Brewer
Swift Creek	Cliff Feather	Pam Erwin

In addition to the many people who made the project successful in the schools, there were others whose support inside Central Office kept the grant running smoothly and efficiently. The authors would like to acknowledge Betty Jean McLamb, project budget facilitator, and Diane Snipes, accounting technician, for their professional support over the last two years.

Finally, the authors would like to express their gratitude to the staff of the Guidance and Social Work Department of Wake County Public School System for their interest in and support of this project. Much creative maneuvering had to be done within the department in order to accommodate the interns, and the Guidance and Social Work staff were most generous in th[illegible] The authors would like to extend special thanks to Lin Gunnet, JoAnne Piper, and Ann[illegible] staff with the Guidance and Social Work Department who welcomed the guidance inter[illegible]ed in their orientation and integration to the department and people within it. They [illegible]dously helpful with administrative support throughout the two years of the grant.

Bill would also like to extend special thanks to the guidance interns. The interns each brought different qualities and abilities to the project and their contributions were critical to our success. The interns were relatively inexperienced with school systems when they began employment in the project, and they were inexperienced with children and family systems vis-a-vis the issue of attendance. Regardless of this inexperience, their professionalism and desire to make a contribution carried the day. Within a very short period of time, the interns were accepted by school staff as professionals and were perceived by children and families as positively helpful.

The project required a high degree of autonomous functioning of the interns and this they did very well. They made introductions for themselves; they set schedules, arranged meetings, and devised interventions; and they identified new initiatives. They worked hard all year long and they continued to work hard until the last i was dotted and the last t crossed in this manual. Maria deserves special recognition for designing our manual's cover, helping with data analyses, and composing answers to many of the questions. Voncyle deserves recognition for preparing the figures and tables, and Kim deserves recognition for formatting, typing, and editing many drafts of the manual. Thank you all! I greatly enjoyed getting to know you, consulting with you on your cases, and sharing in your successes and failures.

I will miss seeing you after the project ends but I have a host of memories of a great group of people. I wish for each of you the best of everything! Please keep in touch.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

** Poor attendance behavior can be identified from habit patterns and teacher reports well before traditional reasons for alarm such as an excessive number of unexcused absences.

** As few as 15 total absences per year, excused and unexcused together, places a child among the extreme 10% of the student population with respect to absences.

** Excessive absence behavior appears to be proportionately distributed among students of all types: female and male, African-American and Caucasian, Kindergarten through 5th grade, high achievers and low achievers, high SES and low SES.

** Attendance in Kindergarten is equally important to attendance at other grade levels; parents and teachers often have misconceptions about this and undervalue significance of the social and academic activities in Kindergarten.

** There is considerable variance among schools in their procedures for coding unexcused absences.

** The most significant, easily made, and lasting improvement in attendance occurs when school personnel and families intervene early, before attendance problems become pronounced.

** It is important for school personnel to meet with families in a nonjudgemental manner, seeking to understand the dynamics that underlie absence behavior; everyone should be involved in a positive fashion to create change for the better.

** Working only with the child to improve attendance is less effective than working with the whole family and school staff in a team approach.

** Children can be helped to improve attendance and, over the long-term, there is no significant difference in rates of improvement with regard to race, gender, or grade. Factors such as prior history of absences, previous retention in grade, academic aptitude and achievement, socio-economic status of family, and number of parents in the family are intervening variables that appear to affect improvements in attendance behavior. With regard to intervention activities, number of contacts with school personnel, phone calls to the home, and agency contacts on behalf of the child also appear to affect successful outcomes.

** Kindergarten students have the highest rate of absences, and fourth and fifth graders may show the least amount of improvement in attendance behavior because patterns of absenteeism have become habituated; early intervention is the key!

** School avoidant, disorganized, and tourist children can be described and it is helpful to think in these terms when designing intervention plans, but few children fit exactly into any one of these types.

** Further research needs to be conducted on the tourist child; very little information is available about this type, and this child and family may prove to be most resistant to change.

** Poor attendance and poor achievement are associated.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY AND LAW

A. GENERAL HISTORY

1. How was education valued in the United States during the late 1700's and early 1800's?

During the late 1700's and early 1800's, school aged children often worked in factories and on farms to supplement family income. Both the government and society deemed child labor beneficial because it gave children an opportunity to learn a trade so that they would not become a burden to society. Parents needing the additional income, were unimpressed with the value of education and/or could not afford the fees associated with private religious schools. It was not until the mid 1800's that social conditions began to emphasize the value of education for children over work.

2. How did the change in social conditions impact children during the mid 1800's?

By the mid-1800's, the rights of children began to surface as a new social value. As early as 1836 significant changes were made in laws regarding child labor. Laws were enacted in several states which restricted the labor of children under twelve to ten hours a day, required factory owners to provide some schooling for children, and outlawed the hiring of children under twelve to work in mills. Many more child labor laws were passed as the rights of children gained recognition, and by 1900 half the states placed some restrictions on child labor. During this period, policy makers began to consider the education of children a national issue, and in the 1850's Massachusetts was the first state to implement a compulsory school attendance policy.

3. What is the history and philosophy behind compulsory school attendance in the United States?

During the mid 1800's and early 1900's, the United States of America experienced a rapid increase in the student population due to the abolition of slavery, an increasing birthrate, and a continuing influx of European immigrants. In addition, increased urbanization and industrialization reduced the

need for fieldhands, servants and apprentices, and the child population no longer was viewed as a dominant workforce. Fearing that dependent, destitute children would take to the streets, local civic-minded citizens created a child-saving movement. Their efforts often included health care, social and educational activities, and settlement houses for youths. Their main focus, however, was government control over a wide range of unacceptable youthful activities that included idleness, drunkenness, vagrancy, and delinquency, and one result of the child-saving movement was to establish compulsory school attendance statutes (Siegel & Senna, 1988). By the turn of the century, 33 states required nine months of school for most children although few enforced these laws (Bamber, 1979).

4. What are the earliest recorded accounts of school attendance in the United States?

In 1870 the first records of school attendance were kept. At that time, only about 55% of the children between 5 and 17 attended public school and, of those enrolled, only 60% attended 50% or more of the time (Bamber, 1979).

5. How did the dropout rate change during the 1900's?

In the 1800's, most children did not stay in school long enough to "graduate". According to Grossnickle (1986) the dropout rate in 1900 was 90%. By the 1930's this rate had declined to about 67%, continued to improve to 59% by 1950, and fell to a low of 28% by 1970. While the dropout rate has improved during the present century, recent studies have shown that the dropout rate has not declined in the last twenty years and may be rising for some groups (Franklin & Streeter, 1991). These groups include those students who have experienced continual contact with delinquent classmates, limited academic achievement, and/or feelings of alienation from school (Siegel & Senna, 1988).

B. STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA LAW

1. When did North Carolina first implement a Compulsory Attendance Law?

The first instance of compulsory attendance in North Carolina was in 1912 when children of age 8-12 were mandated to attend school for four consecutive months, but it wasn't until 1955 that North

Carolina first codified a Compulsory Attendance Law for all children ages 7-16. The law basically reads the same today as it did then, with a few variations regarding special case exemptions, parental responsibility, and the acceptable number of unexcused absences.

2. What are the rules and regulations of the North Carolina State Board of Education governing compulsory school attendance?

In accordance with General Statute 115C-378, every parent, guardian or other person in North Carolina having charge or control of a student between the ages of 7 and 16 years shall cause such student to attend school continuously for a period equal to the time which the school is in session. The term "school" is defined to embrace all public schools and such non-public schools as have teachers and curricula that are approved by the State Board of Education. No person shall encourage, entice, or counsel any such student to be unlawfully absent from school.

3. What does the amendment which governs attendance in kindergarten through second grade state?

According to Senate Bill 804, K-2 Students Must Attend, General Statute 115C-81 is amended to require that any child under age 7 enrolled in grades kindergarten through two shall attend school continuously for a period of time comparable to that expected of any student. Senate Bill 804 was ratified June 18, 1992 and became effective October 1, 1992.

4. When is a student considered lawfully present at school according to North Carolina State Law?

In order to be considered in attendance, a student must be present in school or a place other than the school with the approval of the appropriate school official for the purpose of attending an authorized school activity. Such activities may include field trips, athletic contests, student conventions, musical festivals, or any similar approved activity. In addition, a student must be present at least one-half of the school instructional day in order to be recorded present for that day.

5. When is a student considered lawfully absent from school according to North Carolina State Law?

The superintendent, principal, or teacher who is in charge of a school has the right to excuse a student temporarily from attendance on account of sickness or other unavoidable cause. The following reasons are considered lawful excuses for temporary nonattendance of a student at school and shall be recorded as excused absences. It is important to understand that the school administrator in charge has the authority by law to determine if an absence shall be excused for any of these reasons.

Illness or Injury - A situation where the absence results from illness or injury which prevents the student from being physically able to attend school.

Quarantine - A situation where isolation of the student is ordered by the local health officer or by the State Board of Health.

Death in the Immediate Family - A situation where the absence results from the death of a member of the immediate family of the student. For the purpose of this regulation, the immediate family of a student includes, but is not necessarily limited to grandparents, parents, brothers, and sisters.

Medical or Dental Appointments - A situation where the absence results from a medical or dental appointment of a student.

Court of Administrative Proceedings - A situation where the absence results from the attendance of a student at the proceedings of a court or an administrative tribunal if the student is a party to the action or under subpoena as a witness.

Religious Observance - A situation where the tenets of a religion to which a student and his/her parent(s) adhere, require, or suggest observance of a religious event. The approval of such absences is within the discretion of the local board of education, but approval should be granted unless the religious observance, or the cumulative effect of religious observances, is of such duration as to interfere with the education of the student

Educational Opportunity - A situation where it is demonstrated that the purpose of the absence is to take advantage of a valid educational opportunity, such as travel. Approval for such an absence must be granted prior to the absence.

6. When is a student considered unlawfully absent from school according to North Carolina State Law?

For students between the ages of 7 and 16 and all other students who have enrolled in a public school, an unlawful absence is defined as follows:

a. a student's willful absence from school with or without the knowledge of the parent, or
b. a student's absence from school that is not excused for any of the reasons listed in Question #5.

7. Are there other circumstances under which a student may be lawfully absent from school according to North Carolina State Law?

If a student is confined at home or in a hospital, is therefore unable to attend school, and is receiving homebound instruction from his home school or Local Education Agency, his/her absences are excused and those absences are coded as "Hospital/Homebound" (1H). Additionally, students who are medically fragile may be excused from school attendance. The medically fragile student is one for whom a licensed medical doctor provides documentation that an illness or physical condition is so severe as to limit the student's school attendance. Such students frequently have illnesses that place them in life-threatening situations and/or they may be technology-dependent for life support systems, (i.e. tracheostomy, gastrostomy, etc). In order to account for the absence of medically fragile students, such absences should also be coded 1H.

8. What is the state law when a student accumulates 6 or more unexcused absences?

After not more than six unexcused absences, the principal shall notify the student's parent, guardian, or custodian by mail that the student may be in violation of the Compulsory Attendance Law and may be prosecuted if the absences cannot be justified under the established attendance policies of the State and local Board of Education. The school attendance counselor shall also be notified to investigate the causes of absenteeism, provide input for changing educational programs and settings that will encourage regular attendance, and recommend appropriate community services and agencies to families as appropriate to alleviate material needs and personal/social problems which interrupt school attendance

When a student's unexcused absences reach 10 in any school year the principal shall determine if the parent, guardian, or custodian have made a "good faith effort" to comply with the compulsory attendance law. If the principal determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has not made a "good faith effort" to comply with the Compulsory attendance law, the principal shall notify the district attorney. If the parents are determined to have made a good faith effort to comply with the law, but not the child, the principal may file a complaint with the juvenile intake counselor (NCPL 115C-378).

C. LOCAL POLICY

1. What is Wake County Public School System's plan for monitoring daily attendance?

Parents and guardians are encouraged to notify the school prior to or on the day of a student's absence. At school, attendance is taken early in the day in each homeroom or the equivalent. Teachers are expected to monitor pupil attendance and send a list of absent students to the administrative office each day. Parents/guardians of all students who are absent and cannot be accounted for by a parental contact, administrative prior approval, or other valid information such as a parent's note to the teacher shall be notified of the student's absence by the second consecutive school day following the absence. A school system employee, volunteer, or mechanical notification service shall contact the parent and documentation of such contact will be kept by the school.

2. What is Wake County Public School System's policy regarding written excuses for absenteeism?

Parents must furnish a signed note giving the reason for a student's absences. Notes from the parent are typically accepted as valid, however, the principal has the authority to request that the parent provide additional documentation such as a note from the doctor affirming the reasons for a student's absence. Ultimately, the authority for determining if an absence is excused or unexcused lies with the principal per Board of Education policy and state law.

3. What are Wake County Public School System's procedures for handling unexcused absences?

When a student has accumulated three unexcused absences, the principal or designee shall notify the parent or guardian that the child has accumulated three unexcused absences. After not more than six unexcused absences, the principal shall send Form 1700, "Notice of Unlawful or Questionable Absences," to the student's parent, guardian, or custodian and shall notify the school counselor that Form 1700 has been sent.

The counselor will investigate the causes of absenteeism as quickly as possible and report back to the teacher and principal. The counselor seeks to identify those problems which are interfering with regular school attendance and provide school staff with input for changing educational programs or settings in a manner that will encourage regular attendance. In addition, the counselor will recommend appropriate community services and agencies to families to alleviate material needs or personal/social problems which interrupt school attendance.

4. What are some differences in Wake County Public School System's policies between the elementary and secondary levels?

At the elementary level the teacher shall inform the principal when the child accumulates at least 25 total absences (excused and unexcused combined). When the total absences exceed 30 for the year, the student is then referred to an attendance committee that will determine if the student should be retained for reason of poor attendance. At the secondary level, teachers notify the principal's designee when absences from homeroom or an individual class reach at least seven (7) in a semester or at least fifteen (15) in a year (excused and unexcused combined). For secondary schools, attendance committees are convened for students with 11 or more absences for the semester or 21 or more absences for the year; the committees determine if the student may receive course credit for the semester or the year.

5. When and why were the 30-day elementary and the 20-day secondary policies instituted?

The 30-day elementary and 20-day secondary policies were adopted by the Wake County School Board on June 29, 1988. There were two reasons the policies were instituted. First, after completing a

study of attendance in other school systems across the state and the nation, it was discovered that non-attendance in Wake County was higher than both the state and national averages. The Wake County School Board wanted to send a strong message to parents and guardians that school attendance is not optional and therefore instituted these get tough policies. Second, the Wake County School Board wanted to adopt a consistent appeals process that would ensure fairness to all students who found themselves in danger of failing a grade due to poor attendance. Any student in the Wake County Public School System who feels he/she may be retained may appeal through the following process:

a. Attendance/grades reviewed by principal; principal may waive or uphold policy
b. If the policy is upheld, student may appeal to an in-school hearing board; board may waive or uphold policy
c. If the policy is upheld, the student may re-appeal to the principal
d. If the policy is upheld, the student may appeal to the superintendent
e. If the policy is upheld, the student may appeal to the School Board

6. What outcomes have been seen as a result of the 30-day elementary and 20-day secondary policies?

Based on attendance data that has been collected and averaged for the last five years it appears that the 30-day elementary and 20-day secondary policies are contributing to a positive change in the attendance behavior of Wake County Public School students. During the 1987/1988 school year, the average percentage attendance for students in grades kindergarten through 12 was 93.93%. By the end of the next school year, following implementation of the policies, this average had risen to 94.86% and has continued to climb each year since. The average was 95.05% during the 1990/91 school year; 95.2% during 1991/92; and 95.4% during 1992/93.

CHAPTER TWO

DESCRIPTION OF THE GRANT

A. GENERAL BACKGROUND

1. How did the idea for the attendance project originate?

The idea for the attendance project originated in casework that Dr. Carruthers was doing with elementary children who were described by school staff as school phobic and having attendance problems. While it couldn't be known at the time, the very first case, a first grade girl, had all the essential elements which were later organized into a grant proposal. As more cases developed in all grade levels over the years, similarities were noted among these cases that suggested the outline of a project to improve attendance among elementary children with excessive and unaccountable absences. This background of data, knowledge, and experience provided the basis for a grant application.

2. What was the funding source for the grant?

This project was supported by Grants # 92-191-D3-J019 in the 1991/92 school year and # 92-292-D3-J029 in the 1992/93 school year, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: Bureau of Justice Assistance, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. The Governor's Crime Commission in North Carolina administers the grant program, and information may be obtained by writing to the following address:

Governor's Crime Commission
Department of Crime Control and Public Safety
3824 Barrett Drive, Suite 100
Raleigh, NC 27609

Telephone (919) 571-4736

3. What was the name and purpose of the attendance grant?

Schools and Families: Allies for Attendance was an early identification and intervention program for elementary school staff to use in assisting students to improve attendance behavior. The purpose of the grant was to identify students with poor attendance behavior and conduct interventions with the child, family, and school staff to improve attendance. It was postulated that improved attendance, and variables associated with improved attendance such as better grades or greater participation in school programs, could prevent the emergence of behavioral difficulties, emotional problems, and/or later involvement in juvenile delinquency. The grant was situated in elementary schools because it was Dr. Carruthers' experience that students' poor attendance was most amenable to change in the early grades, casework had revealed poor attendance behavior was very resistant to change in later middle and high school years. By assisting elementary students to improve attendance, the project sought to prevent poor attendance behavior from becoming habituated and even worse problems such as juvenile delinquency from developing in the middle or high school years.

B. OPERATIONAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

1. How did the grant operate?

Most of the money in the grant was used to hire part-time, temporary staff to work in selected elementary schools. There are a number of colleges and universities in the Wake County area and graduate programs in counseling, psychology, and social work provided a pool of talent. Graduate students were employed as "guidance interns" for 20 hours per week on average. These interns were motivated, professional, and a key to the success of the program.

2. How was quality in grant operations monitored?

The interns received training throughout the year through individual and staff meetings. This training was both administrative and clinical in nature. Administrative training consisted of introductions to school personnel, review of system policies and procedures, and orientation to school and community agencies. Clinical training consisted of educational theory and reasons for student absences, discussion of

child development and family systems theories, and case management reviews. Close contact with school principals and counselors was maintained to monitor intern performance. Also, the principals and counselors were surveyed at mid-year of the First and Second Years for their overall impressions of the project.

3. What were the responsibilities of school staff?

Responsibilities of the principal in the project varied greatly from school to school, according to their interest in the project. In some school settings, the principal was very involved in monitoring attendance, in meeting with the child and parents, and in serving on the intervention team. In other settings the principal only became involved when the situation required action from the North Carolina Department of Social Services. Counselor involvement and responsibilities also varied greatly from school to school. In many cases counselors served on the intervention team, made home visitations with the guidance intern, and established small group counseling for students with poor attendance. In other situations counselors provided relevant background information on individual cases.

Teachers at the school sites provided relevant information regarding student behaviors, absenteeism, and family background. In addition most teachers attended family conferences and served on the intervention team. The attendance technician at each school proved to be one of the most important persons, and provided the intern with weekly updated attendance reports on the school population as well as profiles on all individual cases.

4. What was the major emphasis of the attendance project?

The attendance project emphasized the early identification of children with a pattern of excessive and/or unaccountable absences. Three types of children were characterized for intervention efforts according to differences that were evident in the child and the child's family: school avoidant children, disorganized children, and tourist children. The school avoidant child is typically a product of an enmeshed family system; the disorganized child is typically a product of a stressed family system; and the

tourist child is typically a product of an indulgent family system. The prototype for each type of child is distinguished from the others by a unique set of characteristics as illustrated in Table 1 below:

AVOIDANT	DISORGANIZED	TOURIST
Demonstrate emotional distress and psychosomatic complaints	Do not demonstrate emotional distress and psychosomatic complaints	Do not demonstrate emotional distress and psychosomatic complaints
Often average or above average academically, but may be found at any level	Do less well academically	Usually do average or above average academically which justifies for parent allowing child to miss school
Stay at home when not in school	Do not usually stay home when not in school	Take part in an activity with parent(s) when not in school
Parent is aware that child is not in school and often stays at home with child	Absent without parental knowledge and/or permission	Parent is aware that child is not in school, usually with the permission of the parent
Usually not involved in anti-social/delinquent activities until older, and then often toward parent/family members	May become involved in anti-social/delinquent activities	Usually not involved in anti-social/delinquent activities
Includes children from all demographic groups (i.e. age, race, sex, socio-economic status)	Children more likely to come from low socio-economic group	Children more likely to come from high socio-economic group
School attendance problems become chronic over time, and increase during transition years (i.e., K, 6th & 9th grades)	School attendance problems are chronic, especially during middle and high school years	School attendance problems are troublesome, but usually within the outer limits established by school policies
Timid, shy, or socially awkward away from home, but strong-willed at home	Often displays behavioral problems in school and at home	No significant personality patterns are evident, although sometimes psuedo-mature or precocious
School avoidance caused by an overly dependent attachment between parent and child	School is not viewed as a first priority since energies are usually focused on personal aggrandizement or daily needs	School is viewed as secondary to extracurricular family functions
Absence patterns are usually single days or clusters, and often fall around weekends, breaks or holidays	Absence patterns are usually single days scattered throughout the year; sometimes around weekends, breaks or holidays	Absence patterns are usually several consecutive days, sometimes for a week or more at a time

Table 1. Characteristics for the Three Types of Absence Behavior

5. How were interventions conducted?

A 10-step intervention model (Want, 1983) which emphasized team collaboration and systematic planning was adapted and utilized by guidance interns in the project:

a. to organize school intervention teams consisting of these types: child's teacher, school counselor, school administrator, parent(s), and/or family physician and mental health practitioner (if applicable);

b. to formulate an understanding of the family system dynamics and roles played by key family members;

c. to secure the parent's participation as allies in the effort to improve child's school attendance;

d. to establish one team member as case manager and intermediary between school and home, preferably one who is able to provide limited counseling about the dynamics of school absences;

e. to encourage the parent(s) to enter counseling or therapy for themselves and/or their child;

f. to assist team members to develop a 5-week plan for reducing school absences with specific goals for school attendance;

g. to clarify roles of all team members involved in the plan;

h. to prepare the family to resolve various problem behaviors that are likely to arise in the home and at school about the issue of attendance;

i. to begin the attendance plan and strive to limit student or parent complaints and exceptions;

j. and to evaluate progress toward goals, continue case management as needed, and employ recognitions and rewards for improved attendance but have a credible and less attractive alternative available in the event the child or parent(s) fail to show improvement.

6. What were some major differences between the first and second years the project operated?

Although the intent of the project remained the same, to assist students to improve attendance, there were some differences between the first and second years and they include the following:

Number of interns: The project employed five interns during the 1991/1992 school year and seven to eight interns during the 1992/1993 school year. The increase in the number of interns the second year provided each school with additional intern hours, and this enabled the interns to establish larger caseloads and conduct more interventions the second year.

Patterns of poor attendance: During the 1991/1992 school year, interventions focused largely on the school avoidant child, while interventions during the 1992/1993 school year included those with school avoidant behavior but also expanded to include children from disorganized

family systems and those exhibiting tourist behavior. Training for the interns on appropriate intervention strategies was provided for each type of absence pattern.

Start date of interventions: Time was needed for organizing the program, and interventions did not begin until early October during the 1991/1992 year. In 1992/1993, interventions began immediately on the first day of school with cases that were continued from the prior year, and new interventions were started sooner in the year.

Experience of interns: The first year interns were relatively inexperienced with school systems but all were enthusiastic and they worked well together. All five interns stayed in the project for the whole school year. They were employed at $6.00 per hour for 20 hours per week on average, and collectively provided 100 hours per week of service to the schools involved in the project. The second year of the project was funded with more money and it was possible to employ more interns for almost 140 hours per week, collectively. They were employed at $6.45 per hour and also 20 hours per week on average in the second year. The following is a summary of interns, college or university, and program of study for the two years:

1991/1992

Name	School	Program
Debra Crawford	NCSU	Undergraduate Psychology
Janine Easley-Bowman	NCSU	Doctoral level Psychology
Janie Evans	UNC	Master level Social Work
Debra McHenry	UNC	Master level Social Work
Kim Perkins	NCSU	Master level Counseling

1992/1993

Name	School	Program
Janine Easley-Bowman	NCSU	Doctoral level Psychology
Monica Gray	NCSU	Master level Counseling
Teresa Lawson	NCCU	Master level Counseling
Voncyle Lewis	UNC	Master level Social Work
Patricia Lochbihler	UNC	Undergraduate Social Work
Debra McHenry	UNC	Master level Social Work
Kim Perkins	NCSU	Master level Counseling
Stacey Poole	NC A&T	Master level Counseling
Maria Roach	NCSU	Master level Counseling

The collective experience level of the interns was considerably higher in the second year than in the first year. Three of the interns from the previous year returned to the project and two of the new interns had worked as teachers in the schools.

Number of intervention efforts: There was a considerable difference between the two years in the number of students involved in the grant activities. During the 1991/1992 year, 119 students were assisted. During the 1992/1993 grant year, 155 students were newly identified and 53 existing cases from the previous year were continued. There was also a difference in the number of interventions conducted, defined as "contacts" made on behalf of students involved in the project. The interns in the First Year made approximately 900 contacts while interns in the Second Year made approximately 2000 contacts.

Costs: The original grant was an award for one year for $35,000, but not all of this was expended due chiefly to getting the interns started a month late that year; $3,090.52 reverted to the Governor's Crime Commission at the end of the year. The grant application was resubmitted for the 1992/1993 school year and $48,493 was awarded to continue the project for one more year. In the second year of operation it is expected that almost all of the grant award will be expended. The actual costs for both years are depicted in Figure 1.

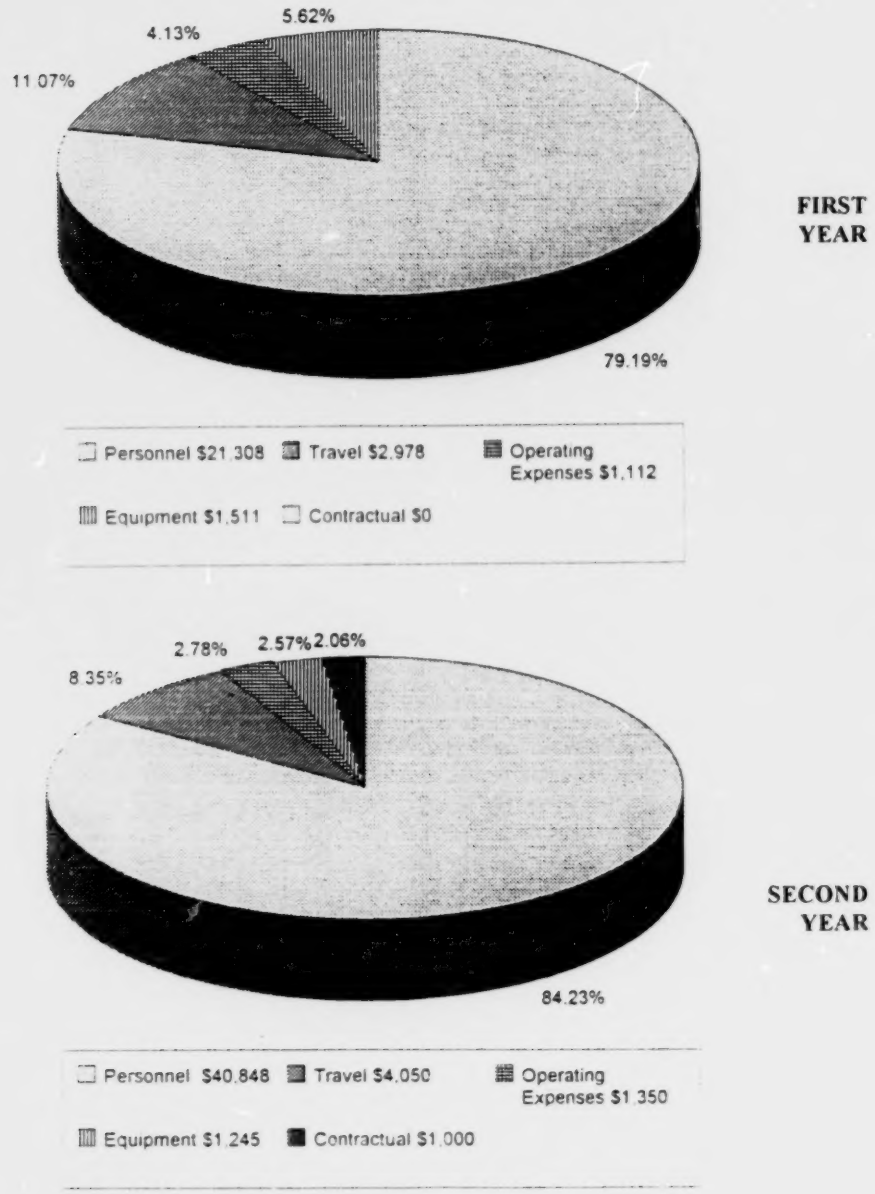

Figure 1. Breakdown of Costs for the First and Second Years

C. GUIDANCE INTERNS

1. What were the qualifications of those who were selected as interns?

Interns were selected from the fields of counseling, psychology and social work. Most were graduate students who expected to receive course credit at their respective universities, either for practicum or internship experiences. Some had former experience as teachers and others had experience through fieldwork in social agencies.

2. What was the job description for the interns?

A large portion of intern responsibilities involved working in a set of 2-3 elementary schools assisting school personnel to improve school attendance among children who exhibited excessive absences. Interns were employed on a part-time basis and spent most of their time at school sites. Interns also participated in case consultation meetings at the central office with other interns, and each intern undertook individual assignments to support and assist in the organizational management of the overall attendance project.

3. What were direct services provided by interns?

The guidance interns were responsible for direct services such as follow:

a. to identify children who exhibit excessive absences, review their records, and prioritize children for interventions, in consultation with school staff;

b. to initiate contact with families of selected students to introduce the attendance project, invite their participation, and coordinate arrangements for school staff and families to meet together;

c. to obtain social/developmental history information with the family vis-a-vis the attendance issue and assist school staff and families to formulate an intervention plan for improved attendance;

d. to assist families to secure additional human services as these could be useful to facilitate improved attendance;

e. to support the school and family in their efforts to improve attendance once the intervention plan is underway and meet periodically with school team to exchange information;

f. and to document child, family, and school contacts and the results of intervention efforts.

4. What were indirect services provided by interns?

Indirect services offered by the interns included the following:

a. to aid in the literature review of school attendance problems, solutions, and interventions;

b. to aid in the organization and implementation of staff development training programs for school personnel on attendance issues in general and the attendance grant project in particular, and help to disseminate information about the project and results through local and state conferences;

c. to aid in the evaluation of the project through collecting, organizing and analyzing data on the interventions which were undertaken;

d. to aid in development of a manual and audio-video tapes that could be shared with schools and families in the future;

e. and to aid in the coordination of the various administrative agencies involved in the grant, including the Governor's Crime Commission, Wake County Government, and Wake County Public School System.

D. ADVANTAGES OF THE GRANT

1. What advantages did the attendance grant provide to the participating schools?

There were several advantages to the schools involved with the grant program. The schools received highly qualified interns to serve as additional support staff. The interns helped schools to keep a focus on attendance, and trained personnel to continue the project after the grant ended.

2. What advantages did the attendance grant provide to the families?

Interns solicited the assistance of the families to improve the child's attendance. As a result, families developed more positive views toward the school, became more aware of the correlation between poor school attendance and success in school, learned strategies to improve attendance, and became allies of the school system.

3. What advantages did the attendance grant provide to the children?

Interns encouraged children to be responsible for improving attendance behavior, and those who successfully resolved their attendance problems gained advantages in other areas of development.

Improved school work, increased self-esteem, better peer group relations, and more positive attitudes toward school were noted in many of the children participating in the program.

4. What advantages did the attendance grant provide to the interns?

There were many positive outcomes for the interns who participated in the attendance program. Interns gained extensive hands-on experience in working with families, children, and school personnel on issues of attendance behavior. Opportunities to participate in educational workshops and to meet others in the field contributed to the interns' professional development. Several interns used their experiences for project dissertations or placements in their graduate work. Some interns developed a professional working relationship with the school counselor which resulted in additional experiences for the intern.

E. OBSTRUCTIONS TO GRANT OPERATIONS

1. Were there obstructions to grant operations found in the schools?

Although the attendance grant provided more pros than cons to the schools, some difficulties were encountered. One difficulty was that schools often lacked space and could not always accommodate the interns' need for privacy during conferences. Another difficulty was that interns were at each school only once or twice weekly and consistent counseling with students was difficult if the child was absent the day the intern came to the school. Finally, in order to continue the attendance project at the same level during the grant operation, schools may need to look for other resources for funding and personnel.

2. Were there obstructions to grant operations found in families?

Time was one factor that sometimes posed a difficulty for families. It was often difficult for working parents to attend conferences during the school day. In a few instances difficulties arose when families were not ready or willing to acknowledge attendance problems. In extreme instances where children had many absences, lack of cooperation or involvement by the parents could lead to referrals to the school social worker, Social Services, and sometimes court. Finally, those families that did become allies of the program may need to seek alternative support systems after the grant ended.

3. Were there obstructions to grant operations found in children?

The children were encouraged to take responsibility for their own behavior and attendance, and this proved very difficult for children that displayed overly-dependent behaviors. School avoidant children have a 'hidden' agenda to stay at home, and changes in the whole family system must occur if these children are to accept responsibility for good school attendance. Among children who were not successful at improving attendance, some may have experienced negative feelings, disappointment and failure, which may have diminished self-esteem. Some children also experienced a feeling of being caught between the school and uncooperative parents who refused the assistance of the intern. Finally, if the child's success depended greatly on relationship with the intern, without continuing support from the intern poor attendance habits could reoccur after the grant ended.

4. Were there obstructions to grant operations found in the interns?

Having interns from different professional fields (counseling, psychology, and social work) brought a variety of views to the project but also created difficulties when interns from one field were encouraged to undertake a task or role that was traditional to another field. For instance, social work interns were relatively inexperienced with individual child or group counseling; counseling interns were relatively unfamiliar with community outreach such as home visits or agency contacts. To their credit, the interns largely overcame such obstacles through cross-training in staff meetings and being open to new experiences in their professional development. The high qualifications of the interns, combined with the part-time/temporary nature of the intern position also proved to be a difficulty in that three interns were lost to full-time positions.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT EVALUATION

1. How was the project evaluated?

While the grant was not a research project, data collection was conducted to evaluate three questions: a) what was the nature of students who exhibit excessive absences from school; b) how successful was the project with improving student attendance behavior; and, c) what characteristics differentiate students who improve attendance behavior from those who don't show improvement? Aggregate statistics were collected for the Wake County Public School System generally and the 13 elementary schools participating in the project, and data on individual student characteristics was collected for those students involved in the project. Case files were maintained for each student involved in the project and confidentiality was protected by using student ID numbers to distinguish students. The confidentiality of the participating schools was also protected by randomly assigning the numbers 1-13 to the schools.

In the following chapter, three periods are referred to: the "Baseline Year", the "First Year" of grant operations, and the "Second Year" of grant operations. The Baseline Year is the 1990/91 school year, the First Year is the 1991/92 school year, and the Second Year is the 1992/93 school year. Unless otherwise noted, data on students involved in the project are reported for the year in which they were first selected to participate in the project. The number of students reported in the various figures, tables, and graphs does not always total to the same amount because of inapplicable and/or missing data.

2. What constitutes typical student attendance behavior?

One of the first tasks in the project was to establish what constitutes typical student attendance behavior. One aspect of this question that we considered was to investigate if student absences varied at different times of the year. Data that was available from the Baseline Year indicates that there is some variation, but this is quite small and occurs chiefly around the Christmas period. Student attendance is the highest at the first of the year, falls off some as Christmas approaches, and then climbs back to levels almost as high as at the first of the year. Figure 2 shows how this pattern was the same for the 13

participating schools as for all other elementary schools in the school system. On the whole, average student attendance is very high, with the lowest percentage for any of the reporting periods being 93.5%.

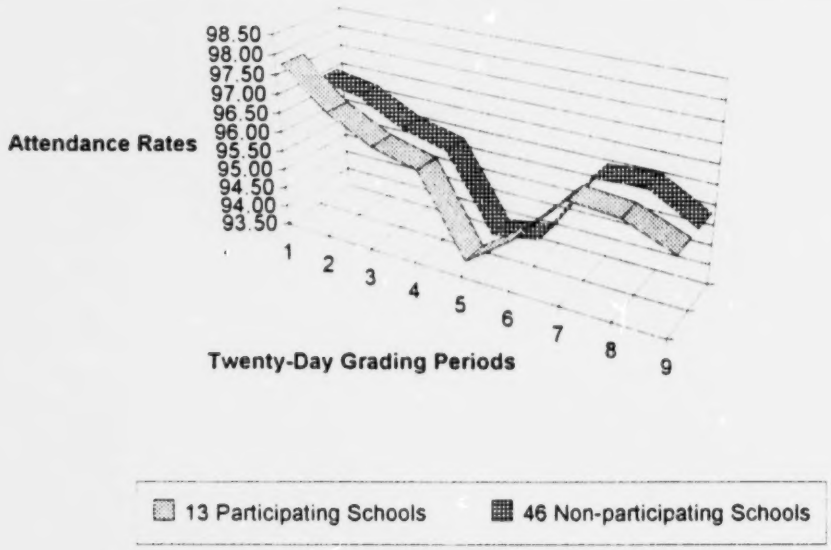

Figure 2. Average Student Attendance for Nine, 20-Day Reporting Periods During the Baseline Year

There are individual students with attendance problems, and another aspect of attendance behavior that we considered was to investigate the total number of absences that students have in a year. Elementary schools use the computerized Student Information Management System (SIMS) to maintain student attendance data. At any point in the school year, it is possible to obtain a computer print-out of all students enrolled at the school and their absences for the year to that point in time (excused, unexcused, and total absences). These print-outs, called "501" reports, were obtained from 12 of the 13 participating schools at the end of the Baseline Year for all students who had one or more absence for the year. There was a total of 6137 students among the 12 schools with one or more absence and Appendix A is a histogram of absence behavior that was built with this data. Students with perfect attendance for the year were not included in this histogram because this data could not be readily accessed

The histogram revealed that greater than 50% of the student population in the 12 participating schools missed 6 or fewer days during the 1990/91 school year; approximately 90% of the students missed 15 or fewer days. Based on this histogram, it was decided that 15 or more absences per year could be used

as one criterion for selecting students to investigate further regarding their attendance behavior. As it turned out, the histogram also proved to be a very useful tool when conferencing with students, parents, and school staff about "typical" attendance behavior. Many parents, and teachers as well, did not have an appreciation that as few as 15 absences could be viewed excessive in light of how 90% of the student population had better attendance.

3. What percentage of student absences were coded unexcused?

There was a total of 49,531 absences recorded among the 6137 students in the Baseline Year. This same data was also collected at the end of the First and Second Years. Table 2 reports this data for the 13 schools for each of the three years.

	Baseline Year			First Year			Second Year		
School	Total Abs.	Unex. Abs.	% Unex.	Total Abs.	Unex. Abs.	% Unex.	Total Abs.	Unex. Abs.	% Unex.
2	4894	32	0.70	4970	245	4.93	4387	1179	26.87
3	4631	137	2.96	5557	281	5.06	5800	396	6.83
12	6225	399	6.41	6711	708	10.55	5740	504	8.78
4	4091	349	8.53	4413	373	8.45	4617	285	6.17
5	3352	286	8.53	3175	356	11.21	3129	534	17.07
8	2045	283	13.84	3635	452	12.43	3551	468	13.18
10	4769	662	13.88	5418	842	15.54	5070	345	6.80
1	6325	965	15.26	5893	1519	25.78	5821	2460	42.26
7	4105	664	16.18	4562	1008	22.10	4929	823	16.70
11	2771	471	17.00	3758	486	12.93	4343	720	16.58
9	4144	981	23.67	2781	585	21.04	3930	949	24.15
13	2179	680	31.21	3618	805	22.25	3503	755	21.55
6	no data	no data	no data	4498	602	13.38	6301	580	9.20
Totals	49531	5909	11.93	58989	8262	14.01	61121	9998	16.36

Table 2. Total Absences by School for the Baseline Year, First Year, and Second Year

Table 2 indicates that there is considerable variation among schools in the percentage of absences that are coded unexcused, suggesting that school personnel have different interpretations of the policy for excusing absences and/or practices for enforcing the policy. This seemed to be the case when we interviewed principals and learned that the attitude of some was to interpret attendance policies strictly and excuse virtually no absences that did not meet policy guidelines while others described a more liberal attitude. Although there is variation among schools, the percentage remains fairly constant over the years for each individual school, suggesting coding practices may become habituated in a school over the years, somewhat like a tradition.

Traditions can change, however, and close inspection of Table 2 reveals three schools (Nos. 2, 5, and 1) with dramatic increases in the percentage of unexcused absences in the Second Year. Two of these schools had purposely changed the default on their SIMS computer program from one that automatically coded all absences excused (thereby requiring a manual entry to code an absence unexcused) to one that coded all absences unexcused (thereby requiring a manual entry to code an absence excused) so as to place additional responsibility on both school staff and family members to ensure that absences were accounted for. The increase in percentage of unexcused absences after changing the default suggests schools using the other approach may code some absences excused that should be coded unexcused.

4. What were some of the characteristics of students who had excessive absences?

Using the SIMS 501 reports for the 12 schools at the end of the Baseline Year, we investigated the gender, race, and grade of those students who had 15 or more absences during the year. There were 671 students among the 6137 (approximately 10%) who had 15 or more absences during that year. Among these students, gender of student was evenly split between males and females; regarding race, African-American and Caucasian students were nearly in proportion to their representation in the student population as a whole; and, grade of student revealed a mode in the Kindergarten year followed by a decline in absence behavior as students entered higher grades. One interpretation of these findings is that sex and race of student do not appear to be related to absence behavior, but grade of student is possibly related with the highest frequency of absence behavior being in the Kindergarten year. It is important to

appreciate that nothing is known about these students in the Baseline Year other than their gender, race, and grade; possible reasons for their absences (e.g., legitimate or unaccountable) are unknown. Figure 3 depicts the percentages for these variables among students in the Baseline Year.

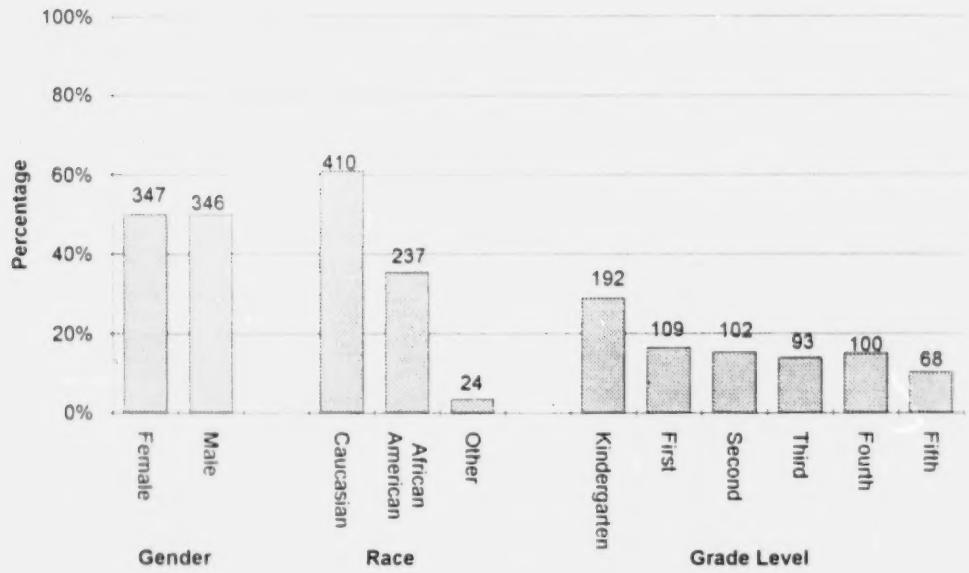

Figure 3. Percentage Distributions for Students with 15 or More Absences During the Baseline Year by Gender, Race, and Grade

5. How many students were involved in the project?

During the First Year (1991/92), the guidance interns worked approximately 100 hours per week and identified 119 students for intervention efforts. During the Second Year (1992/93), a larger group of interns, working approximately 138 hours per week, identified 155 students for intervention efforts. Additionally, interns in the Second Year continued to monitor and/or work with 53 students identified in the First Year who were still at any of the 13 schools involved in the project. The number of interns and hours employed were different in the two years of the project but the rate of identifying new students for intervention efforts was similar for the two years.

First Year Rate: $\frac{\text{119 Newly Identified Students}}{\text{100 Hours of Internship per Week}} = 1.19$

Second Year Rate: $\frac{\text{155 Newly Identified Students}}{\text{138 Hours of Internship per Week}} = 1.12$

6. How many students were identified at each of the schools?

Interns were assigned to 2 or 3 schools for 8 to 10 hours per week at each school, on average, in each of the two years. The schools varied in size of student population from as few as 450 students to almost 1000 students. The mode among schools for identifying students was 11 to 13 students per year, but there was considerable variation among schools.

In the smaller schools as well as the larger schools there were many students with excessive absences, but not all of the schools had the same sense of mission with regard to attendance behavior and some schools identified few students. Moreover, just as there were differences among the schools, there were differences among the interns, and the match between school and intern seemed to affect how many students were identified at a school. There were many things that schools could do to assist the interns, and the interns had much to learn about the ways of the schools. Figure 4 depicts how many students each school identified in the two years.

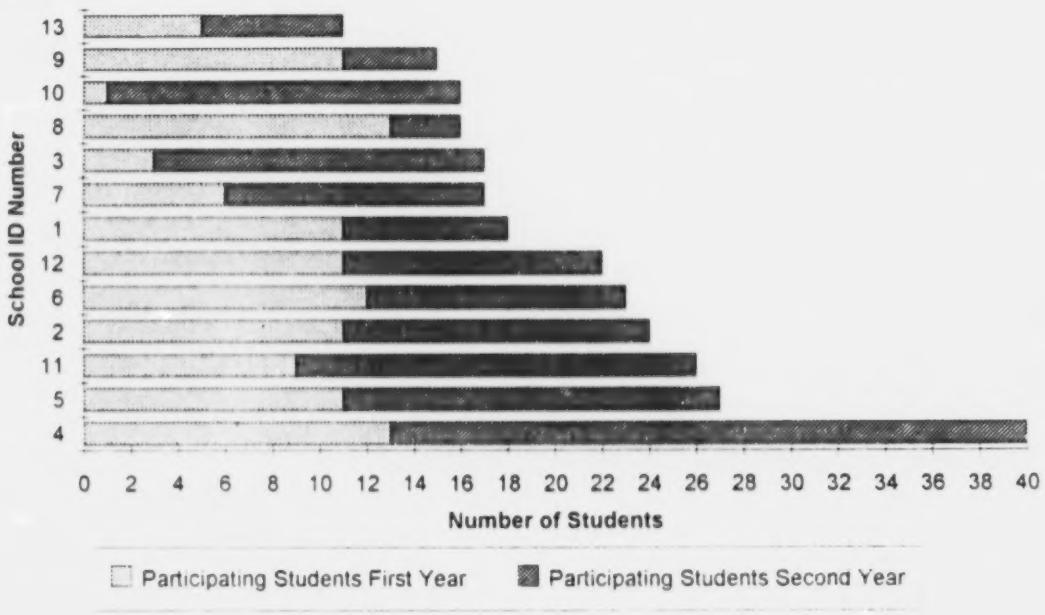

Figure 4. Number of Students Participating in the First and Second Years of the Project by School

7. When were interventions conducted with students during the year?

Once the interns and school identified a student for intervention efforts, and after assessing the student's current and past attendance behavior, reviewing the student's school records, and interviewing school personnel about the student, then the intern attempted to contact the child's guardians, usually by phone. If telephone contact could not be established, the intern would send a handwritten letter and if this too failed, a home visit would be attempted. However it was accomplished, the initial contact with the family was for the purposes of explaining the attendance project and inviting their participation with the school to improve the child's attendance. This initial contact was designated the Start Date for the interventions. Start Dates were coded 1 through 180 for the day of the school year on which the intervention was started; the next 25 consecutive school days (including the Start Date) constituted the intervention period and the 25 consecutive school days that preceded the Start Date constituted the pre-intervention period.

Start Dates in the First Year ranged between day 34 and day 146; the median Start Date for 108 cases was day 94. Start Dates for new cases in the Second Year ranged between day 9 and day 155; the median for the Second Year was day 73. The interns started sooner and stayed in the field longer in the Second Year compared to the First Year; 32 cases had been started in the Second Year by the time the first case was started in the First Year, and 3 cases were started in the Second Year after the time the last case was started in the First Year. Moreover, the median Start Date in the Second Year was a month earlier than in the First Year. Operation of the grant ran more efficiently in the Second Year, allowing for an earlier start in the field, and two interns that were hired mid-way through the Second Year were desirous of gaining experience and contributed to developing an atypical number of new cases late into the year.

8. How did the distribution of students in the First and Second Years compare to that found in the Baseline Year by gender, race, and grade?

The interns were an additional resource for schools to utilize, but they could not be expected to help every student that needed help. There were too many students needing help and it was necessary for the interns and school staff to prioritize students for the project. When decisions were made about

priorities, there was always a possibility that various biases could affect these decisions. Data from the Baseline Year was used to compare with that from the First and Second Years to investigate possible bias by gender, race, and grade.

Figure 5 compares the Baseline Year, First Year, and Second Year for the percentage distribution of students by gender. Consistent with the baseline, males and females were equally represented in both years of the project, suggesting absence behavior is not related to gender of student, and the model and procedures for identifying students for interventions were unbiased with respect to gender of student.

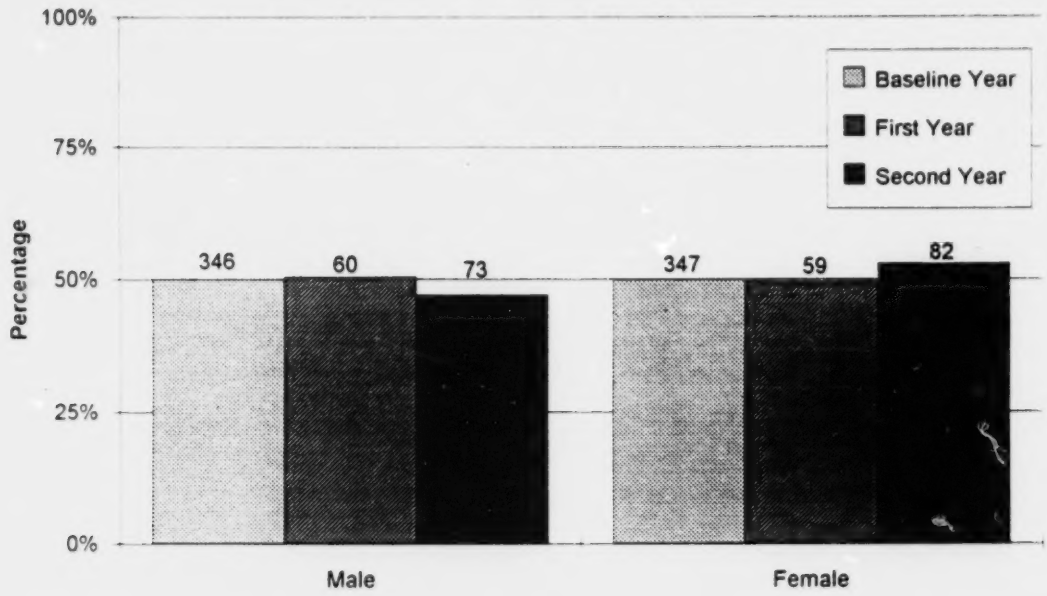

Figure 5. Percentage Distribution of Baseline, First, and Second Year Students by Gender

Figure 6 compares the three years for the percentage distribution of students by race. In the elementary grades, African-American students constitute about 27.3% of the total student population, and data from the Baseline Year revealed a small overrepresentation of African-American students. A similar overrepresentation was seen in the First Year, but this increased to become disproportionate in the Second Year.

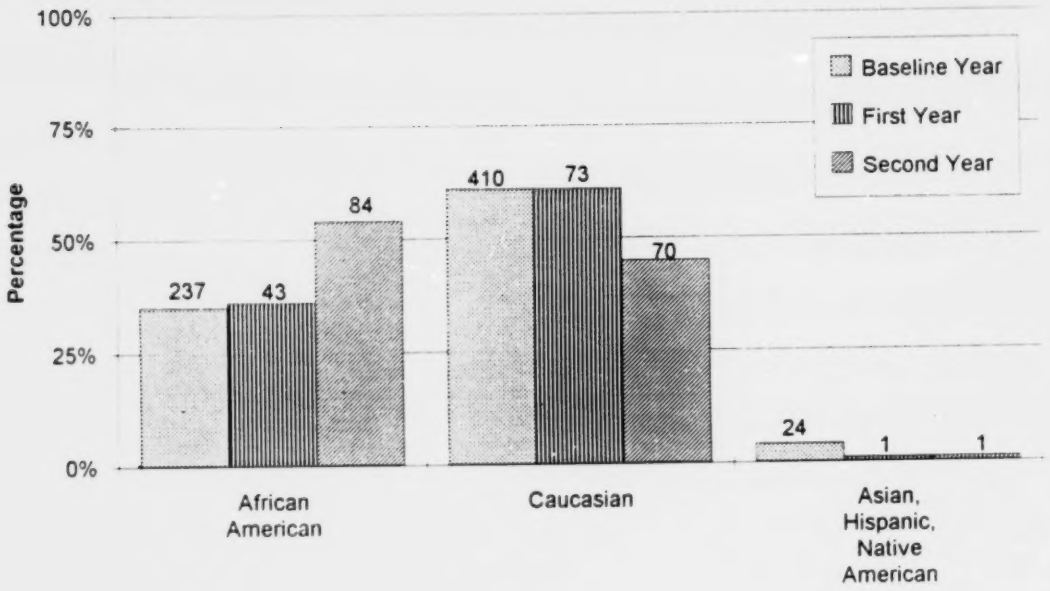

Figure 6. Percentage Distribution of Baseline, First, and Second Year Students by Race

The increase in percentage of African-American students in the Second Year of the project could be related to a number of factors. One factor that differed between the two years of the project was the expansion from one category of explanation for student absence in the First Year (school avoidance) to three categories of explanation in the Second Year (school avoidance, family disorganization, tourism). The addition of family disorganization, in particular, might account for some part of the higher percentage of African-American students in the Second Year because of how family disorganization is associated with low SES which in turn disproportionately affects minority families.

The race of the interns each year is another factor that could account for some part of the increase in the Second Year. In the First Year, all interns were Caucasian while in the Second Year, three of the eight interns were African-American. Interns might be influenced in decision-making by personal characteristics such as race, and/or school staff might utilize interns differently according to personal characteristics. The possible interrelationship between race of intern and race of students identified for interventions was posed as a question for the Second Year interns and they indicated that they did not feel

this was a factor. In any event, there is the possibility of some bias by race in the intervention model due to factors such as selection procedures, decisions made by personnel involved in the operation of the project, and/or willingness of different races to participate in the project.

Figure 7 compares the three years for the percentage distribution of students by grade in school. The Baseline data revealed the highest frequency of excessive absence behavior was in the kindergarten year, but the data for the First and Second Years show different patterns. The distributions in the First and Second Year vary, but the collective pattern for the two years was bimodal. Most students selected for interventions were in their early (K-1) or late (4-5) elementary years, and there appears to be some bias by grade operating in the selection of students. There may be a conscious logic in this bias, for instance, if school personnel chose to focus energies on young students in an effort to get them off to a good start or older students in an effort to change habit patterns before they go on to middle school.

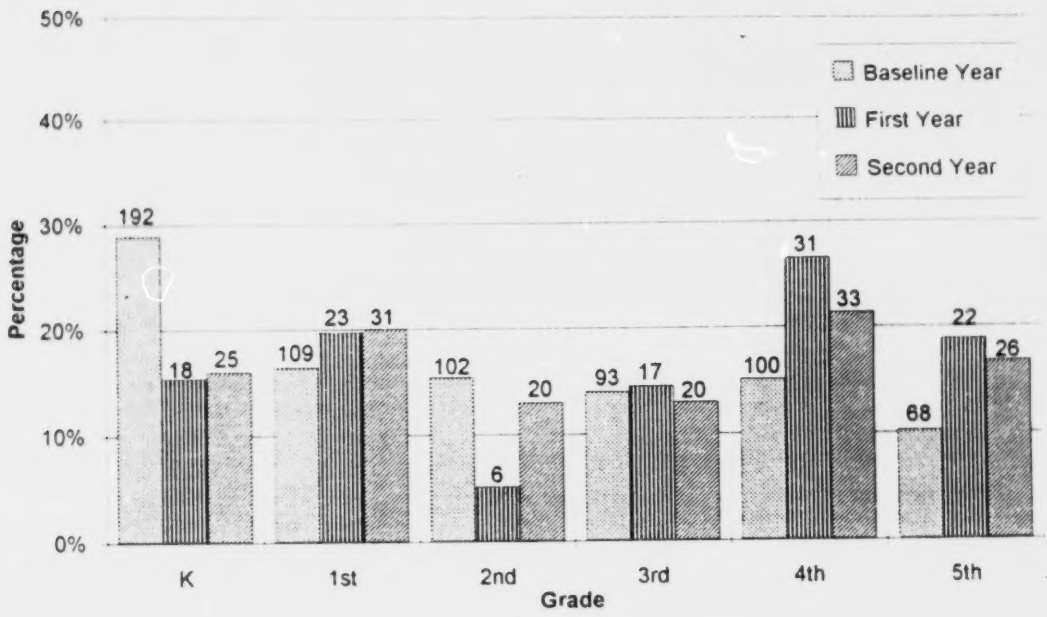

Figure 7. Percentage Distribution of Baseline, First, and Second Year Students by Grade in School

With respect to the Baseline Year, the selection of students for intervention efforts appears to have been unbiased for gender, but biased for race and grade. The reasons for such biases cannot be known with certainty but possible causes can be hypothesized. The bias for race in this project may be an interaction between the nature of why a student is missing school and individual characteristics of interns and/or school staff. The bias for grade may be a function of conscious choice, picking students early or late in their elementary years for different reasons.

9. What were some of the academic characteristics of students involved in the project?

One characteristic the project investigated was to note how many students had been retained in grade. Data was available on 212 students who were in 1st grade or higher the year they were first involved in the project, and 25.4% of these had been retained. Comparable data was not available for the school system as a whole, but it is likely that the percentage of retentions found for students in the project was higher than that which exists among students generally.

Another characteristic the project investigated was students' scores on the Otis-Lennon Scholastic Aptitude Test (OLSAT). Scores on the most recent administration of the OLSAT were collected, and data was available for 116 students in the two years of the project. The mean standard score for these students was 95.99 and the standard deviation was 16.02. The distribution of their scores approximates a normal curve as would be expected for standard scores. Figure 8 depicts the distribution of these scores.

A third characteristic that the project investigated was student performance on the California Achievement Test (CAT). Data was organized for 121 students' Total Battery percentile score on the CAT in the spring of the year they were first selected to participate in the project; the mean of these scores was 52.66 and the standard deviation was 28.81. Figure 9 depicts the distribution of these scores. The distribution approximates a rectangular shape as would be expected for percentile scores.

The data on the OLSAT and CAT scores together indicate children with excessive absences cover the spectra of academic abilities and skills. Poor attendance behavior is just as likely to be found among students with high intellectual aptitude as among students with low intellectual aptitude; with high academic skills as low academic skills. The model and procedures for identifying children to participate

in the attendance project appears to have been unbiased with regard to intellectual aptitude and academic skills.

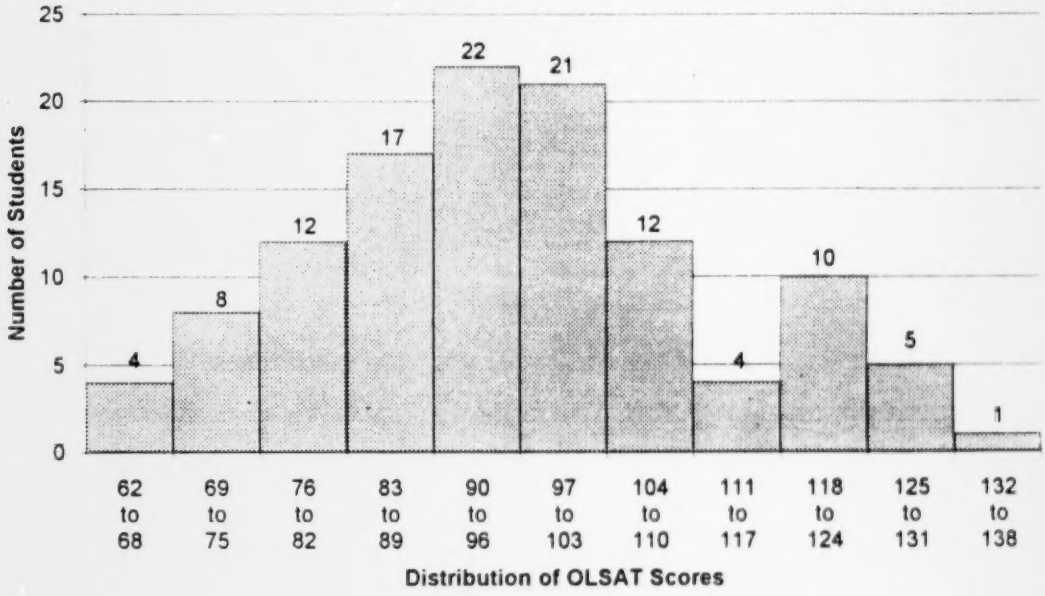

Figure 8. Distribution of OLSAT Standard Scores

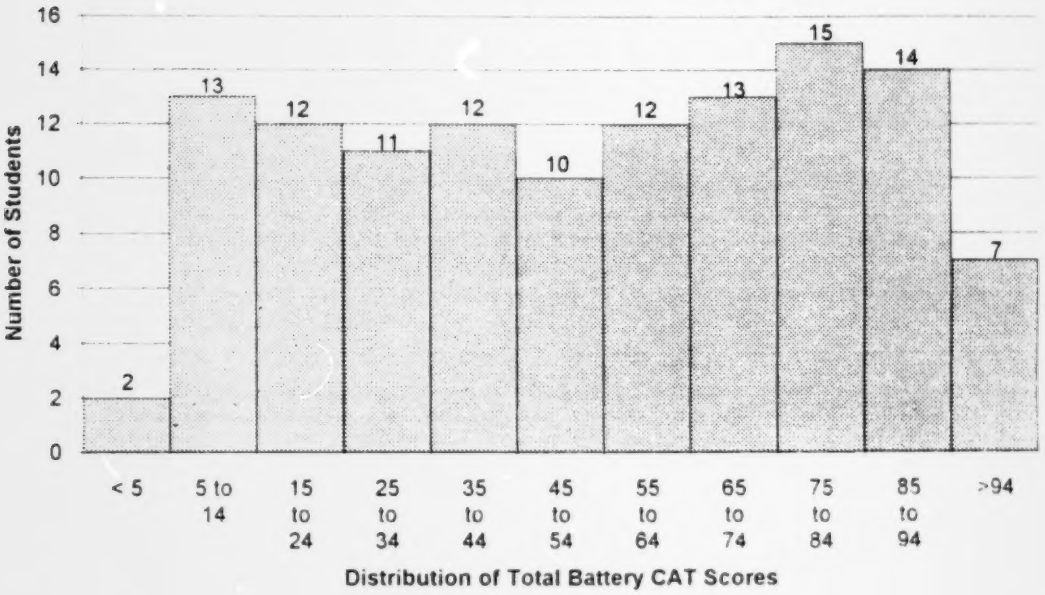

Figure 9. Distribution of CAT Percentile Scores

10. What were some other characteristics of students involved in the project?

Change of Schools: It was amazing to find that 72% of the children on whom we had data had changed schools at least once in their elementary years; 36.1% had changed schools at least twice. This data is especially significant when one considers that half of these children had yet to complete the 3rd grade. It is unknown how frequently students in the general population change schools, but it is probable that the frequency found among students in the project was higher than the general population, and school changes almost certainly contribute to poor attendance. If the change of school is initiated by the family, absences often occur before enrolling at the new school. If the change is in response to school system dictates, then adjustments that the student must make to the new school may contribute to absences. Figure 10 depicts the number of changes in school that children had experienced prior to the time they were first identified for the attendance project.

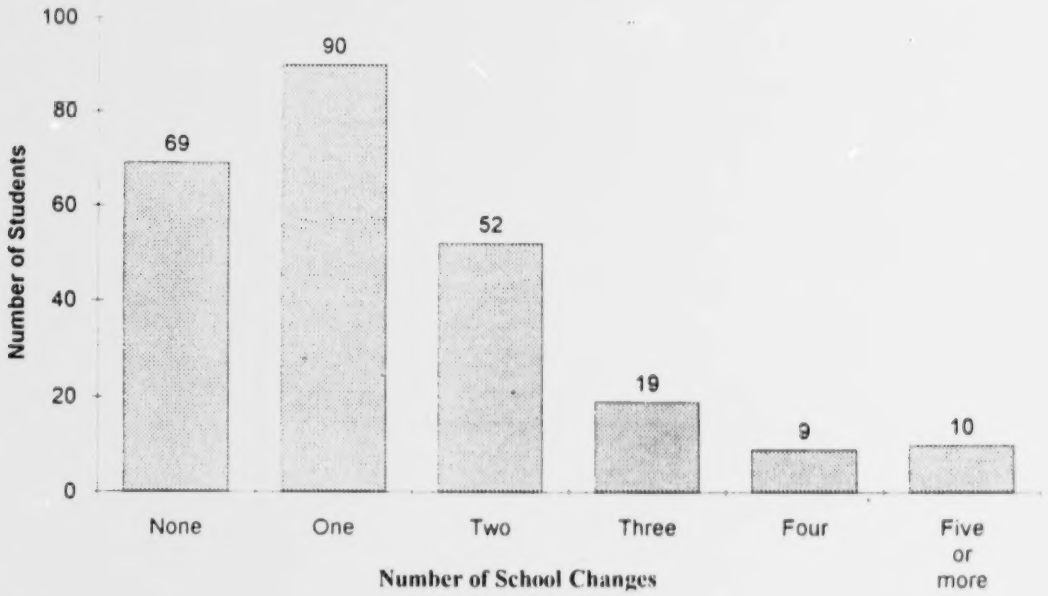

Figure 10. Distribution of Students by Number of School Changes

Single Parent Household: Forty percent of the participating students lived in single-parent households at the time they were identified to participate in the project. This percentage is higher than what exists in the general population at any given moment, according to one source which indicates 25%

of children under age 18 currently live in single parent families (Youth in... , 1993). It is interesting to note that this same source indicates children in single-parent households are twice as likely to exhibit school absenteeism as children in two-parent households.

Siblings: Most of the students had two or fewer siblings, although this data is highly variable due to the many different types of family structures. The interns tried to record siblings and birth order according to the natural mother but not for other children associated with stepparents.

Birth Order: Students varied in their birth order, but the largest number of these were first borns. Because children yet to be born in some of these families might also exhibit attendance problems in later years, this data appears distributed approximately as one might expect in a situation where the average number of children in families nationwide lies between two and three.

Lunch Status: Data was available on 245 students and 128 (52.2%) of these received free or reduced pay lunches. This percentage is considerably higher than that for the whole population of elementary students. Figure 11 depicts the distribution for these latter four variables.

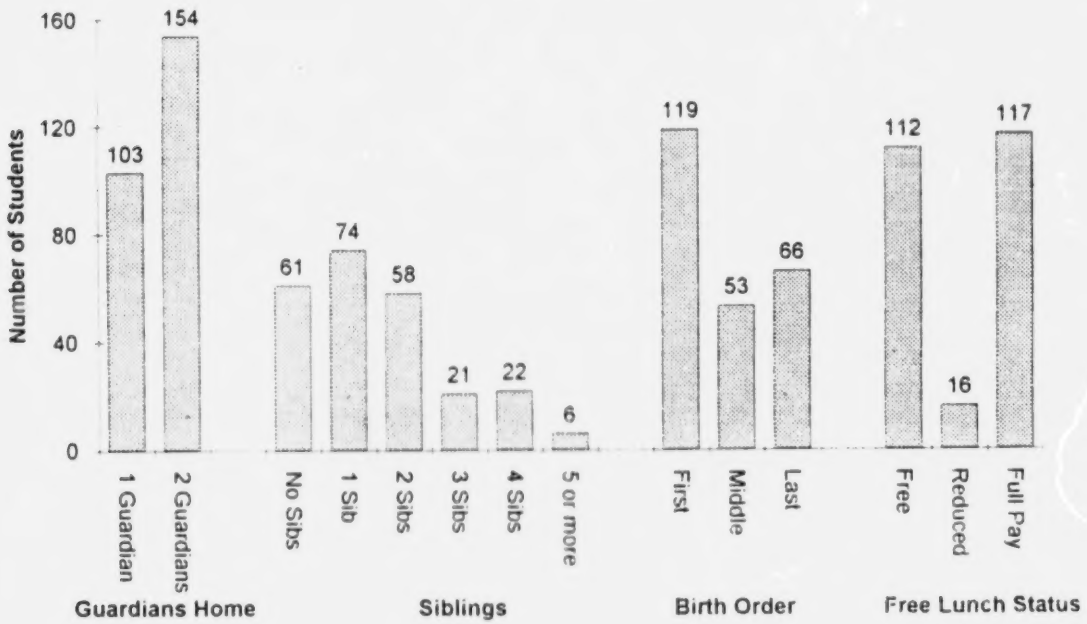

Figure 11. Guardians in the Home, Siblings, Birth Order, and Lunch Status for Students in the Project

11. Is there an association between attendance and academic performance?

Data for the state of North Carolina suggest attendance is associated with student performance on the California Achievement Test (CAT). Table 3 provides data on absences that was collected for North Carolina students in 3rd, 6th, and 8th grade who took the CAT in the Spring, 1992, showing that higher levels of absences are associated with lower levels of performance on the CAT.

	Absences for the Year	N	Mean CAT Score on the Total Battery
3rd Grade	0-7	65444	693
	8-14	14210	686
	15-21	3043	677
	>21	883	662
6th Grade	0-7	60720	742
	8-14	16090	734
	15-21	4300	725
	>21	1847	711
8th Grade	0-7	52894	765
	8-14	17049	756
	15-21	5503	747
	>21	3769	736

Table 3. Mean CAT Score on the Total Battery for 3rd, 6th, and 8th Grade Students in North Carolina by Number of Absences for the 1991/92 Year at the Time of CAT Administration.

The association between attendance and academic performance revealed in Table 3 is evident, but a variety of factors may mask an even stronger relationship. For instance, the three categories of student's absences are not equal in size, and nothing is known of the reasons for the students' absences.

Students in the attendance project were at the extreme in terms of absenteeism and this attenuation of range would mask any correlation that may exist between their absences and performance on the CAT; however, it was possible to investigate how a change in absence behavior from year to year might be associated with a change in performance on the CAT each year. Total absences for students at the end of the First or Second Years were subtracted from total absences for the previous year, providing an index of change in attendance behavior, and their score on the CAT total battery in the same year was subtracted from their score for the previous year, providing an index of change in CAT performance. A negative change in attendance behavior (less absences than the previous year) is associated with improved

attendance behavior, and a positive change in CAT performance (higher score than the previous year) is associated with improved CAT performance; a negative correlation between these two indices would suggest that improved attendance and improved performance on the CAT are associated.

Complete sets of data were available on 75 students, and there was a -.28 correlation between the two indices. This correlation is small but it is in the expected direction. As one might expect, the relationship between the two variables is most evident at the extremes. At one extreme, CAT scores improved for 10 of 12 students whose attendance improved by nine or more days over the previous year. Among students with poor attendance habits, improvement in attendance behavior appears to be associated with improvement on the CAT, especially for children who have many absences and the attendance improvement is on the order of 10 days.

12. What types of interventions were conducted with students and families?

Interventions were of three different types and eight different activities. One type of intervention was educational in which the effort was chiefly to inform the children, families, and school staff on attendance issues; another type of intervention was quasi-counseling in which the effort was to assist children, families, and school staff to develop a different understanding of individual, family, and/or school system dynamics that affected attendance; and, a third type of intervention was legalistic with extreme and resistant families wherein the effort was to imply or actualize legal action. Interventions with individual cases followed a progression from the former to the latter type, and many interventions had elements of two or all three types mixed. Interventions were also characterized by different activities, and records were kept of the eight activities for each case as follow:

Meeting With Child (MWC) - intern and child met in individual or group setting for at least 15 minutes;

Meeting With Parent (MWP) - intern and parent(s) met in individual or group setting for at least 15 minutes;

Contact With School Personnel (CSP) - intern and school personnel met in individual or group setting regarding a child or had contact by telephone;

Phone Call to Home (PCH) - intern telephoned the child's home (or relative) and made contact with someone in the home or left a message on an answering machine;

Letter Mailed to Home (LMH) - intern mailed a letter to anyone in the home or related family;

Attempted Home Visit (AHV) - intern visited the home or other place such as work setting but did not make contact with anyone;

Completed Home Visit (CHV) - intern visits the home or other place and makes contact with family member(s);

Agency Contact (AC) - intern makes personal or telephone contact with an agency other than the child's school on behalf of the child or family.

All instances of each activity were recorded in the case files the interns maintained for each student. A number of the activities could be conducted simultaneously such as MWC, MWP, and CSP. There was an average of 11.20 activities per child for all students in the year they were initially identified. Additionally, there was an average of 9.53 activities per child for the 53 children in the Second Year who continued in the project after being identified in the First Year. Interns in the First Year carried out approximately 900 activities for 111 children; interns in the Second Year carried out approximately 1500 activities for 149 students identified that year and another 500 activities for students continued from the First Year. Table 4 represents the averages per student for the eight activities for 260 students in the year they were identified.

Description	N	MWC	MWP	CSP	PCH	LMH	AHV	CHV	AC	Total
Composite Avg.	260	1.92	.95	2.81	2.97	1.50	.13	.35	.57	11.20
Female Avg.	135	1.39	.67	2.29	2.10	1.33	.09	.28	.40	8.55
Male Avg.	125	1.62	.96	2.53	2.67	1.14	.14	.34	.62	10.02
African-American Avg.	124	1.40	.57	2.61	1.61	1.37	.21	.48	.64	8.89
Caucasian Avg.	136	1.60	1.01	2.21	3.07	1.12	.03	.16	.38	9.59
African-American Female Avg.	70	1.24	.56	2.51	1.50	1.56	.13	.37	.54	8.41
African-American Male Avg.	54	1.59	.59	2.74	1.76	1.13	.31	.61	.76	9.50
Caucasian Female Avg.	65	1.55	.77	2.05	2.75	1.09	.05	.18	.25	8.69
Caucasian Male Avg.	71	1.63	1.24	2.34	3.37	1.14	.01	.14	.51	10.41

Table 4. Averages per Student for Eight Activities Conducted by Interns

Inspection of Table 4 reveals some interesting findings. Phone calls to the home and contact with school personnel were the two most frequent activities. Total activities per child were greater for males relative to females and Caucasians relative to African-Americans, but the differences were not great. Larger differences, however, were seen for specific activities by race. Phone calls to the home and meetings with the parent were almost twice as frequent for Caucasian students as for African-American students, while attempted home visits, completed home visits, and agency contacts were twice as frequent for African-American students as for Caucasian students. The pattern of these variables is probably a function of lower SES levels in minority families with phones less frequently present in the home and the presence of more stressors in family life that contributed to disorganization vis-a-vis school attendance, necessitating more frequent agency contacts.

13. How many students improved their attendance behavior during the project?

There were four methods by which changes in attendance behavior were measured. The first two methods each investigated two periods of time in the same school year and compared changes in the number of absences during those periods. The second two methods each investigated equivalent periods of time in different school years and compared changes in the number of absences during those periods in the two years.

Method A: The principal method of investigating changes in absences was to compare absences during the intervention period with those during the pre-intervention period. The intervention period, beginning with the Start Date, extended for 25 consecutive days of school, and the pre-intervention period consisted of the 25 consecutive school days which immediately preceded the Start Date. This method helped to focus the interns' attention on a five-week period of time, the intervention period, in which to try to effect an improvement in attendance behavior. Five weeks were deemed an adequate period of time in which to see progress toward short-term goals.

A student's absences during the pre-intervention period were subtracted from those during the intervention period such that a negative differential reflected improved attendance behavior during the intervention period, and a positive differential reflected worse attendance behavior. Data was available for

240 students over the two years of the project, and Figure 12 depicts the distribution of differential scores for these students; 164 (68.3%) of the students improved in attendance. There was a total of 1044 absences for the 240 students during the pre-intervention period and 544 absences during the intervention period, representing a 47.9% reduction in absences. Figure 13 demonstrates this relationship.

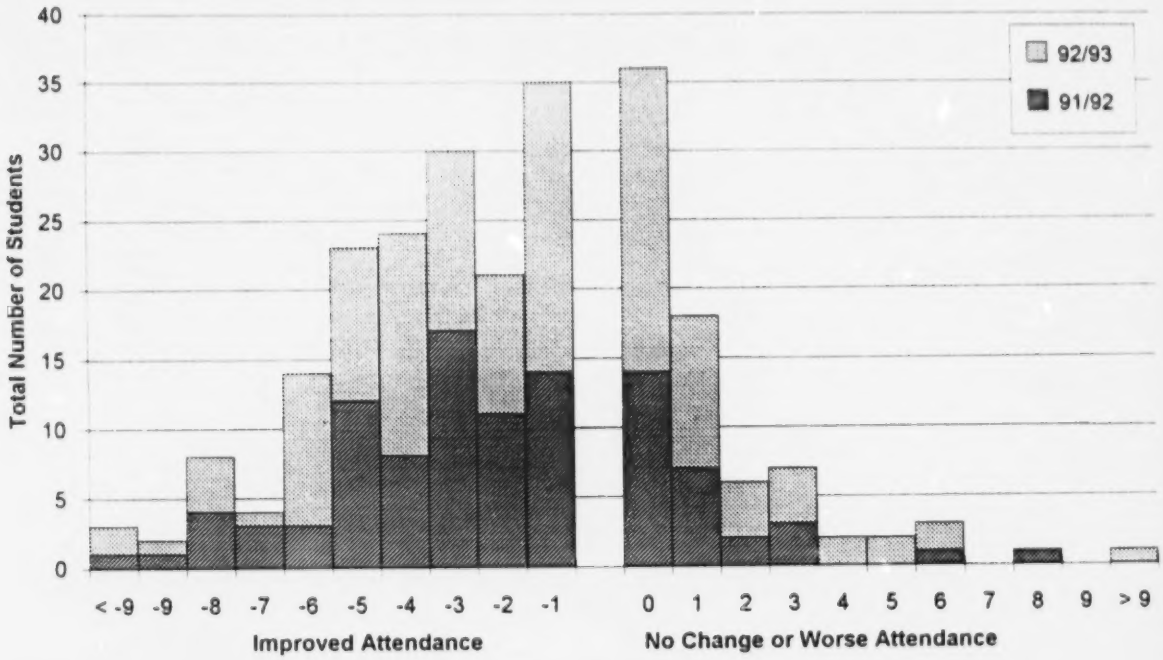

Figure 12. Differential Scores for Absences by Method A

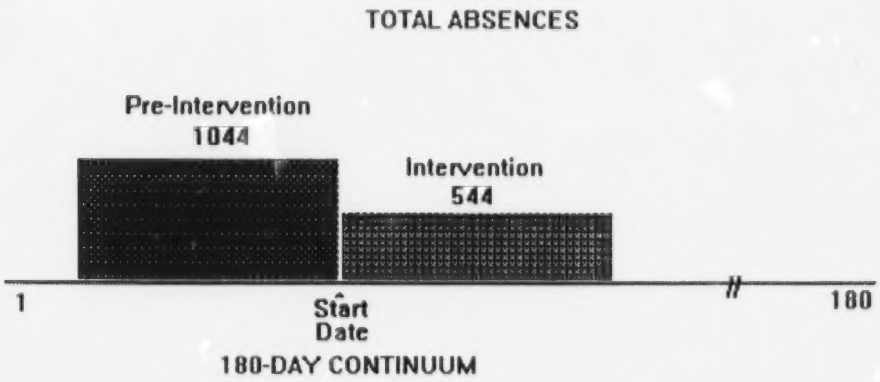

Figure 13. A Demonstration of Total Absences for the Intervention and Pre-Intervention Periods

Method B: A second method for investigating changes in attendance behavior was to consider the entire school year and the periods before and after the Start Dates. In many cases, interventions extended well beyond the 25-day intervention period, sometimes for the rest of the school year. The interns often commented that their efforts with a particular student did not begin to show success until some time after the 25-day intervention period, in which case the whole year should be evaluated. Because the Start Dates varied, or some students entered school after the first day or left school before the last day, it was necessary to use ratios of absences rather than absolute numbers. For instance, consider a student who was in school for the full year with a Start Date of day 57, and who had 15 absences before this day and 12 absences after this day; the two ratios for this student would be 15/56 (.268) and 12/124 (.097), indicating the child had improved attendance with proportionately fewer absences after the Start Date than before the Start Date.

The difference between these ratios is another differential score that can reveal change in attendance behavior. Should a smaller ratio follow the Start Date than precedes the Start Date, then this would indicate improved attendance behavior; a negative differential again indicates improved attendance. Data was available on 219 students and 169 (77.2%) of these had negative differentials. Figure 14 depicts the distribution of these differential scores.

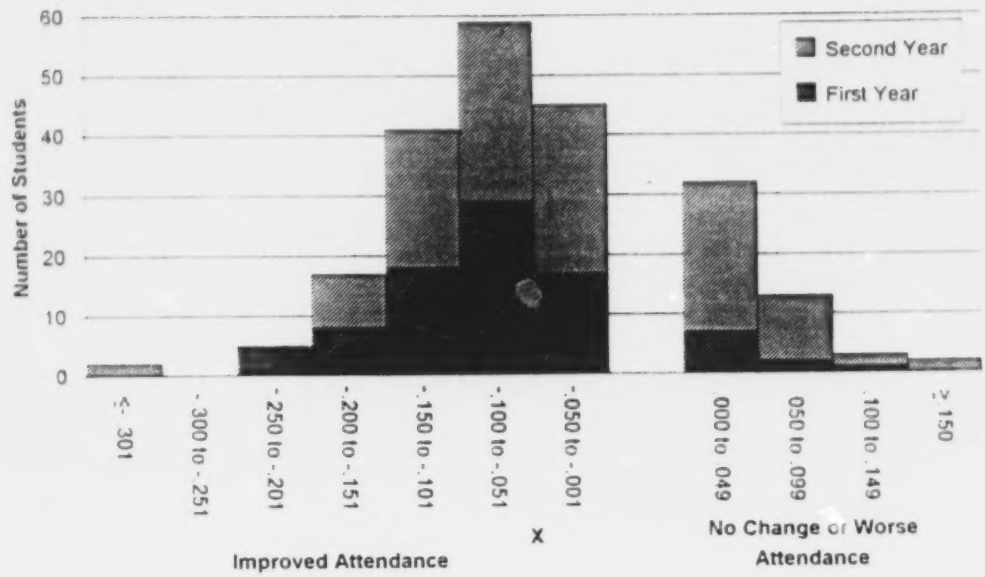

Figure 14. Differential Scores for the Ratio of Absences by Method B

Method C: A third method for investigating changes in attendance behavior was to subtract a student's absences during the intervention period from those for the equivalent period of time in the previous school year. Negative differential scores again reflected improved attendance behavior. Data was available for 182 students and Figure 15 depicts the distribution of these differential scores; 96 (52.7%) of the students improved in attendance. There was a total of 427 absences in the intervention period and 505 absences in the equivalent period for the prior year, representing a 15.4% reduction in absences. Figure 16 demonstrates this relationship.

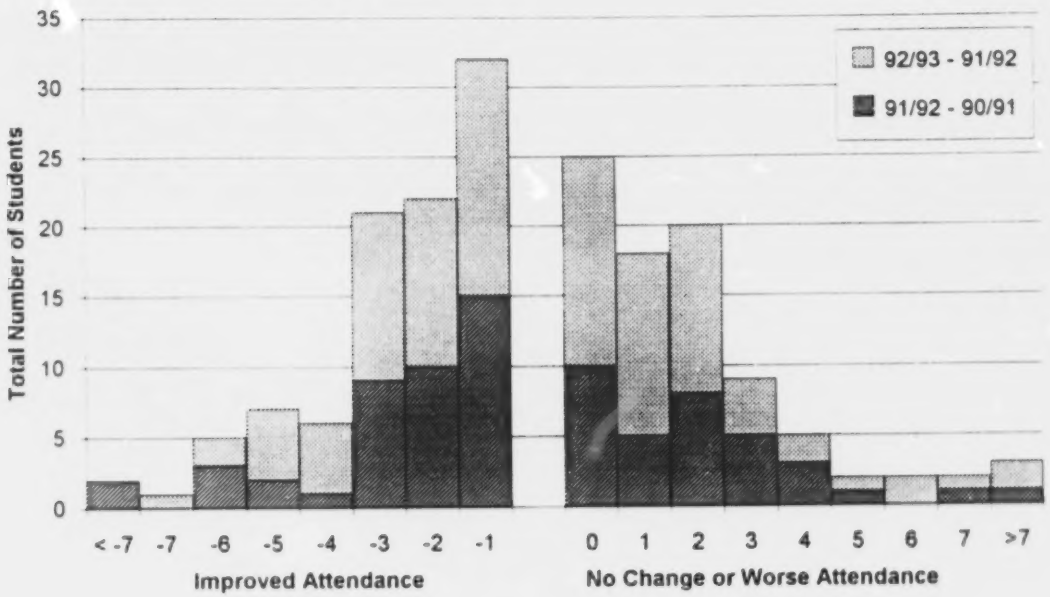

Figure 15. Differential Scores for Absences by Method C

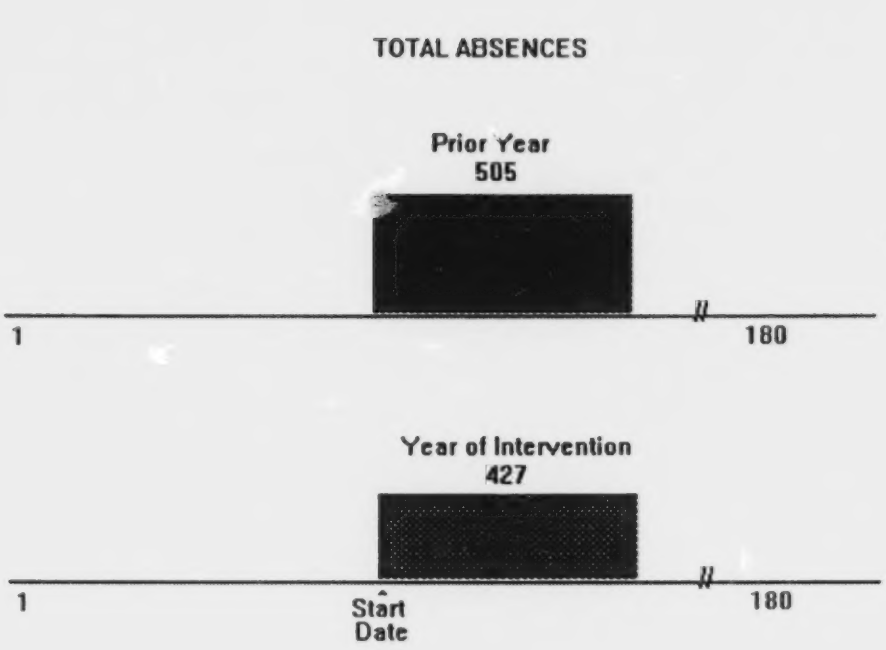

Figure 16. A Demonstration of Total Absences for the Intervention Period and Equivalent Period in the Prior Year

Method D: The fourth method for measuring change was to consider a student's total absences for the whole year in which the intervention was conducted and subtract these from his/her total absences for the previous year. As with the other methods, a negative differential reflects improved attendance. Data was available on 201 students and 85 (42.3%) of these had improved attendance in the year of the intervention. Figure 17 depicts the distribution of differential scores for total absences. There was a total of 4143 absences during the intervention year and 4066 absences during the prior year, representing a 1.9% increase in total absences.

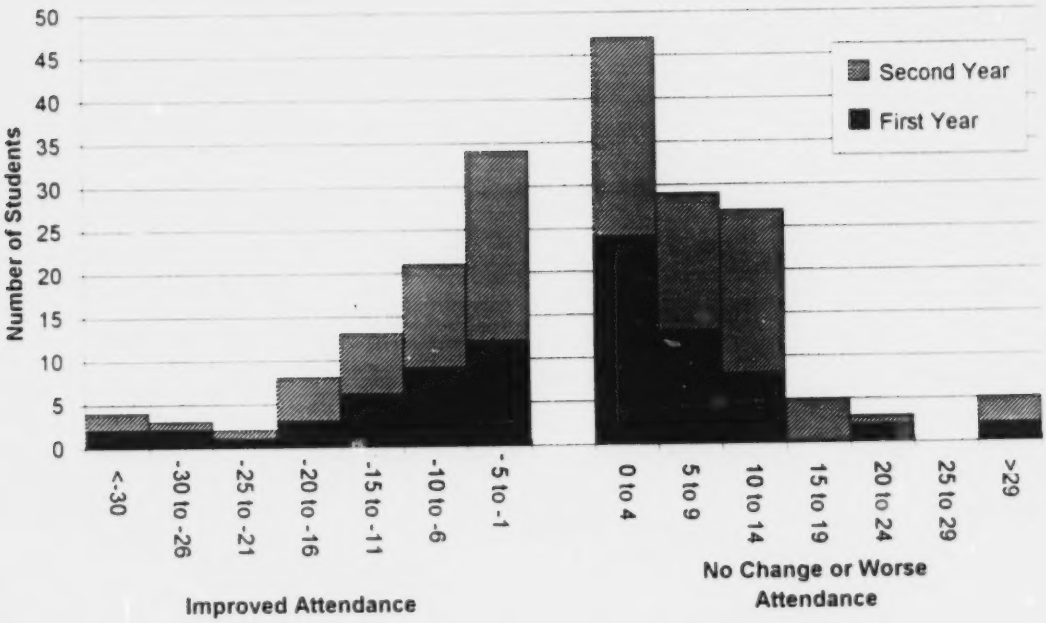

Figure 17. Differential Scores for Absences by Method D

The different methods for measuring changes in absence behavior give different results. The first two methods make comparisons within the intervention year and show that 66% or 77% of the students improved attendance behavior; however, the last two methods which make comparisons between two years show that only 42% or 53% of the students improved. There is also a difference in the number of absences. The first method shows a reduction in absences of almost 50%; the third method shows a reduction of 15.4% and the fourth method shows an increase of 1.9%. The results obtained by the four different methods suggest that it is relatively easy to have success in the short-term such as a 5-week intervention period but more difficult to have success over longer periods such as a whole year.

14. What was the long-term success with students who were involved in the attendance project both years?

There were 53 students who were involved in the project both years because 1) they were still enrolled at a participating school in the Second Year and 2) there was still a need to improve attendance behavior. Data collected on total absences for these students in the Baseline, First, and Second years shows them to be very resistant to change as a group. Complete data sets that were available for 37 of the students revealed an average of 23.05 absences in the Baseline Year before any intervention; 21.19 absences in the First Year when interventions were initiated; and, 16.78 absences in the Second Year when interventions continued. There was continued improvement in the Second Year, but the group's average was still above the 15-day criterion used to screen prospective students for the project, suggesting there is still room for improvement.

The improvement in the Second Year was associated with increased intervention efforts on the interns' part. The interns averaged 6.95 interventions per student in the First Year for the 37 students and 11.57 interventions per student in the Second Year. The gains that were made in the Second Year were at higher costs than in the First Year.

Results of this analysis and the analyses by the four methods above indicate students can be helped to improve attendance behavior. On the whole, it can be said that at least half of the students in the project were helped to improve attendance behavior in the short-term and over the long-term. This is especially significant in light of the fact that all students in the project were among the most extreme in the general student population in terms of poor attendance behavior.

Some students made significant and lasting improvements with only mild intervention efforts, indicating that early identification and intervention procedures are very important to successful outcomes. Other students who made improvements after two years of intervention efforts and who still had room for further improvement indicate that it is important to continue intervention efforts.

15. What factors associated with the project operation contributed to success?

Differences by Year: When the data is analyzed separately for the First and Second Years, the First Year was more successful than the Second Year. With regard to Method A that compared the

intervention and pre-intervention periods, there was an average improvement in attendance of 2.25 days per student (N=101) in the First Year and 1.92 days per student (N=138) in the Second Year. By Method B that compared pre- and post-Start Date ratios, the average differential of these ratios in the First Year was -0.080 per student (N=84) and -0.048 per student (N=132) in the Second Year. By Method C that compared the intervention period to an equivalent period in the previous year, there was an average improvement of 0.68 days per student (N=72) in the First Year and 0.34 days per student (N=106) in the Second Year. By Method D, that compared total absences in the intervention year to total absences in the previous year, there was an average improvement of 0.66 days per student (N=83) in the First Year and a loss (getting worse) of 1.05 days per student (N=117) in the Second Year.

Two hypotheses that might explain why the project was less successful in the Second Year are, one, that interns had larger case loads in the Second Year and/or, two, that the project was less selective in the Second Year when the disorganized and tourist categories were added. With regard to the first hypothesis, interns in the Second Year not only had larger case loads but also conducted many more interventions: approximately 2000 in the Second Year compared to 900 in the First Year. With regard to the second hypothesis, the project was originally designed with the school avoidant child in mind because it was believed that this type was the most amenable to change; the other two categories were added to Second Year operations in response to requests from school personnel to broaden the scope of type of children being identified.

Differences by School: The data on absences was organized separately by school for the four analytical methods. The 13 schools were rank ordered from most to least successful at producing average gains in student attendance by each of the four methods, and the top five schools in each rank ordering were noted. One school was among the top-five ranks in all four rank orderings, twice being first and twice being second, and another two schools were among the top-five ranks in three of the four rank orderings. With five top-five ranks per method and four methods, these three schools accounted for 10 (50%) of the 20 possible top-five rankings. The other 10, top-five rankings were distributed among seven schools, and three schools didn't make it into any of the top-five ranks by the four methods. The consistency with which three schools demonstrated relative success by different methods, and which

cluded three other schools, suggests that there are probably factors peculiar to the school administration, staff, and overall operation of the school that contributed to the success of this project.

Differences by Intern: Just as schools were rank-ordered, all students involved in the project were rank-ordered according to change in absences that they showed by each of the four methods and two groups of students were selected. Students who were most successful in two or more of the four methods, with at least one method being a same year comparison (Method A or B) and one method being a different years comparison (Method C or D), comprised a group of most successful interventions; there were 19 students in this group. Students who were least successful by the same rules comprised a group of least successful interventions; there were 24 students in this group.

The two groups were contrasted for a variety of variables, one of which became evident almost as an afterthought. Among the most successful interventions, four of the ten different interns over the two years accounted for 18 of the 19 cases. These same four interns were also involved with 10 of the 24 least successful cases, but their dominance among the most successful cases suggests intern characteristics played a part in the relative success with students. One characteristic of note is that three of these four interns were social workers, and some part of their success may have related to their disposition or training which pays particular attention to family and community systems. It is also of note that the four interns and the three successful schools described above were matched for 10 of the 19 cases, suggesting there was an interaction between school and intern. Some schools evidently supported interns well and fostered success, and some interns evidently assisted schools well and fostered success.

16. What factors associated with the child contributed to success?

Differences by Sex: The data on student absences was organized by the students' gender for the four analytical methods. Females and males made similar gains by all but Method D where males outperformed females when total absences for the intervention year were subtracted from total absences the prior year, however, the difference between the two averages is only 1/2 day for the year. The average for males was +0.07 days per student (N=99) and +0.58 days per student (N=101) for females, and this

difference appears inconsequential. Just as the identification and selection procedures appear unbiased with regard to gender, the success of interventions appears unbiased with regard to gender.

Contrasting the two years separately, males outperformed females in all four analytical methods in the First Year. Yet, in the Second Year females outperformed males. Interns in the Second Year were aware of the results from the First Year, and one explanation for this switch may be that interns compensated and attended more carefully to the success of female students in the Second Year. Because males tend to exhibit more overt behavior problems than females, interns in the First Year may have worked more intensively with males than females with an unspecified bias that females were more likely to improve attendance behavior than males.

Differences by Race: African-American and Caucasian students made similar gains by Methods A and B which make same-year comparisons, but Caucasian students outperformed African-American students by Methods C and D which compare the intervention year with the previous year. Both races appear to be equally successful in the short-term, but there may be a difference with the Caucasian student being more successful over the long-term. However, it is necessary to be cautious with these interpretations because the rates are not stable from year to year.

Contrasting the two years separately, in the First Year Caucasian males outperformed all others in each analytical method except for Method D (African American males outperformed Caucasian males in this particular method); African American females showed the least improvement in three of the four methods. Yet in the Second Year, African American females improved the most in the first two methods, Caucasian females in the third method, and African American males in the fourth method. Caucasian males were not at the top by any of the methods in the Second Year. The improvements of all African Americans and Caucasian females in the Second Year may be associated with the interns' awareness of the lack of success experienced by these groups in the First Year. Because these differences are small, and the rates are not stable from one year to the next, it seems safe to say that all students regardless of gender or race, stand the same chance of improving attendance behavior.

Differences by Grade: Students across all grades, K-5, showed gains as well setbacks in reference to the four analytical methods used to measure improvements in attendance. No clear pattern of one grade performing better or worse than another was identified.

Other Contributing Variables: The two groups of most successful (N=19) and least successful (N=24) students were contrasted for a number of variables. Students' gender did not differ significantly between these two groups; males and females were evenly divided in the two groups; however, there was a difference for students' race. Among the most successful students, race was evenly split between African-American and Caucasian students; among the least successful students, 2/3rds were African-American and 1/3rd were Caucasian, but differences in socio-economic status appears to be a compounding factor. Among the most successful students, only 41% (7/17 with missing data on 2 cases) received free or reduced lunch at school while 64% (14/22 with missing data on 2 cases) of the least successful students received free or reduced lunch. The Start Date for the most successful students was about 7 days earlier, on average, than for least successful students, but this doesn't appear to be a difference of practical significance. The total number of intervention activities were greater for the most successful students (11.3 per student, on average) than for least successful students (7.6 per student, on average) with the most noticeable differences in activities being that there were more contacts with school personnel, more phone calls to the home, and more agency contacts on behalf of the most successful students. Birth order didn't seem to differentiate the two groups although it may be a factor that contributes to attendance problems generally: most students in both groups were first borns. Retention in grade may be a difference in an obverse fashion; more students among the most successful (7/17 with missing data on 2 students) had been retained than among the least successful (7/24). History of absences in the previous year also seems to have functioned in an obverse manner; the average number of absences that the most successful students had in the previous year was 30.1 but only 18.5 for the least successful students. Number of parents in the household appears to be a difference; 76% (13/17 with missing data for 2 cases) of the most successful children lived in two-parent households, while only 39% (9/23 with missing data for 1 case) of the least successful children lived in two-parent households. Academic achievement may also be a difference. The average percentile score on the CAT Total Battery for the most successful students was

51.8 but only 37.3 for the least successful students, and this was consistent with the difference noted for academic aptitude; the average standard score on the OLSAT for the most successful students was 97.5 but only 92.6 for the least successful students.

17. What did principals and counselors involved in the program have to say about the grant?

At mid-year in each of the two years of operation, the counselors and principals at the 13 schools were surveyed for their impressions of the project. Overall impressions in the First Year were favorable and these became even more positive in the Second Year. Five Likert-style items were included on both surveys and their descriptions are indicated in Figure 18 along with the average of ratings that the principals and counselors gave each item.

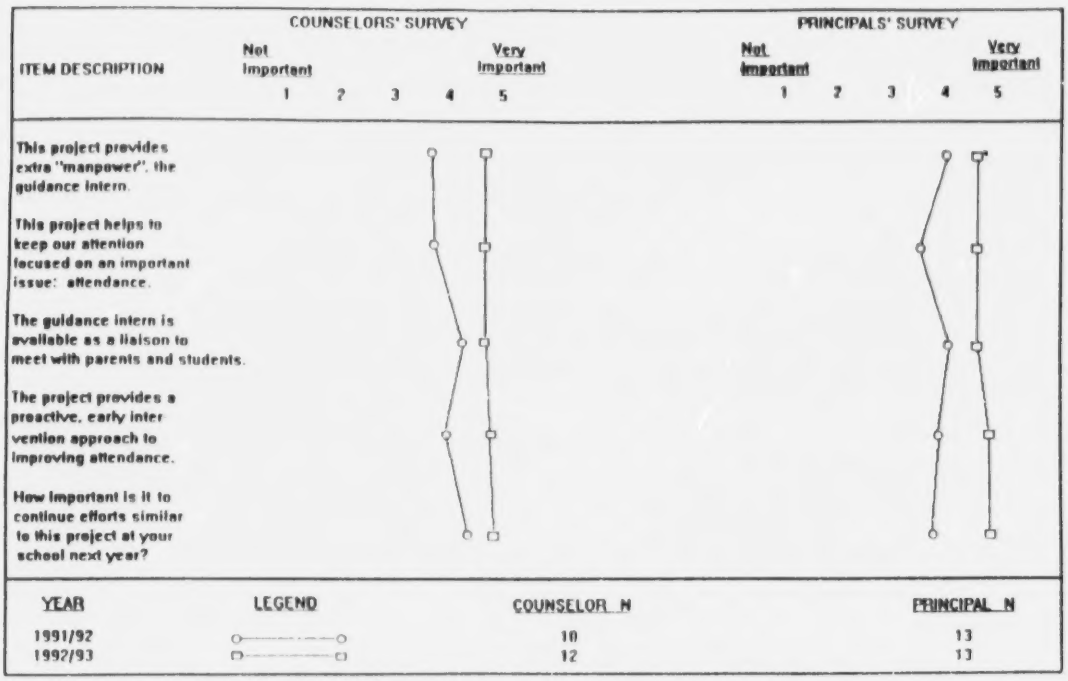
COUNSELORS' SURVEY
PRINCIPALS' SURVEY
ITEM DESCRIPTION
Not Important
Very Important
1 2 3 4 5
This project provides extra "manpower", the guidance intern.
This project helps to keep our attention focused on an important issue: attendance.
The guidance intern is available as a liaison to meet with parents and students.
The project provides a proactive, early inter vention approach to improving attendance.
How important is it to continue efforts similar to this project at your school next year?
YEAR
LEGEND
COUNSELOR N
PRINCIPAL N
1991/92
1992/93
10
12
13
13

Figure 18. Principal and Counselor Ratings of Project on Five Likert-Style Items

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

A. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES: SCHOOL SYSTEMS

1. What practices should be followed in the identification of children with excessive and unaccountable absences?

A caseload of students can be built by following these practices:

a. At the beginning of the school year, request a printout from the SIMS technician which shows the attendance history of all students with one or more absences in the previous year. If this information is not computerized, it may be possible to have classroom teachers report this information.

b. Determine what is considered average student attendance behavior by building a histogram of absence behavior, and decide what number of absences per year shall be taken to indicate excessive absences. This number may be settled upon by focusing on the 10-15% of students who exhibit the most absences. Results of this project suggest 15 absences per year is an appropriate number to work with.

c. With the list of students and the number that will indicate excessive absences, highlight all those students who are at the school for the current year and had this number of absences or more the previous year; count all absences, excused and unexcused, in this number. These students are candidates for possible intervention efforts.

d. Enlist the assistance of the SIMS technician, counselor, teachers and administrators to eliminate those students among the candidates who are known to have had legitimate reasons for being absent the previous year. It will be most helpful to confer with the teachers who had these children in the previous year to gather information on possible reasons for their being absent. Additional information may be gathered from each child's cumulative folder, such as the child's history of attendance behavior since Kindergarten.

e. With the candidates that remain, schedule home visits, parent/teacher conferences, and/or meetings with the child to further explore reasons for absent behavior. If the list of remaining candidates is large, it will be necessary to prioritize students for intervention efforts.

The key to success by this approach is early intervention. Following these procedures, one is able to identify students with 'questionable' attendance behavior before such behavior becomes habituated. The ideal is to identify students well before absences reach critical levels, and conduct interventions with these children, families and teachers when only minor adjustments are needed.

2. How important is a "team approach" to success?

A team approach consisting of the child's teacher(s), counselor, principal, parents, and often the child, is very important to a successful intervention. Family physicians and mental health practitioners could also be important to success even though they would not have as direct or frequent involvement as school and family members. One team member, often the counselor, should be designated case manager and have responsibilities to act as intermediary between school and home, communicate with other team members, and take the lead to develop the intervention plans.

3. How important is it that teachers understand the policy for coding excused and unexcused absences?

It is imperative that all school personnel, especially teachers, understand when to code an absence excused or unexcused to ensure consistency at the school so that the same standards will be applied to all children fairly. Staff training aimed at clarifying existing state and local attendance policies may be necessary to develop this common understanding. So as to spot questionable attendance behavior at the earliest moment, the most effective methods for recording absences may be as follows:

a. If the teacher does not have prior notice of a student's absence, the teacher should mark the child unexcused the day the child is not present.

b. The teacher notifies attendance personnel to change the unexcused absence to excused when the parents subsequently provide an explanation. The teacher should advise the administration when explanations are suspect; the principal has the authority to accept an excuse or not.

c. If no explanation or excuse note is received, absences should remain coded unexcused.

d. Attendance personnel should notify the administration and school counselor when total absences begin to accumulate, and monitor unexcused absences.

e. Periodically during the year, the attendance personnel review all students with high absences, looking for new candidates for possible intervention efforts. Among those with high and unaccountable absences, new students for interventions are identified according to whether their rate of absences, if maintained to the end of the year, would put them at or above the cutoff number (i.e., 15 per year).

4. How important is it for school personnel to have parent conferences and/or home visits?

The most significant element of the intervention process is to make every effort to develop an allied relationship with families. Parental conferences at the school are ideal because this establishes that attendance is a school concern, but these may be inconvenient for parents. In such instances other arrangements such as evening conferences, phone calls, or home visits should be made. Worksite or home visits during the day demonstrate how committed school personnel are to attendance.

5. How important is personal contact with families?

There is absolutely no substitute for personal contact with families, preferably face-to-face. Telephone calls are useful and letters may be necessary, but both of these miss the nonverbal nuances that one can pick up in personal meetings. The risk of miscommunication is less for personal visits than for telephone calls or letters. Personal and early contact with the family unit provides an opportunity for the school and family to become allies in the pursuit towards improved attendance.

B. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES : FAMILY SYSTEMS

1. What is the most important practice regarding intervention with a family system?

The most important practice is to make contact, typically by telephone, with the intent of setting up a conference with the child's parent(s) or guardian(s). If the family has no telephone, letters may be mailed, but consider a home visit to better build a positive relationship. Letters should briefly state the purpose of the attendance program, the concern regarding the child's attendance, and an invitation for a conference at the convenience of the parent(s) or guardian(s). If the parent/guardian(s) lack transportation to and from the school, accommodations should be made accordingly. The nature of the initial contact should be to express friendly and concerned interests on the child's behalf.

2. What are effective practices regarding family conferences?

School personnel should begin by briefly explaining the attendance project and soliciting the parents' allied cooperation. Data on school and/or district attendance behavior can be shared to establish

what is "normal" or "typical" student attendance. For instance, the histogram of absences in Appendix A proved to be very useful as an educational tool and sometimes made such an impression upon parents that little else was necessary as an intervention.

Another tool that was developed in the project was an absence calendar (Appendix B) to record a student's absences. An absence calendar can be used to depict the total number of absences and to indicate if there are any patterns to a student's absences, for instance, most absences falling on Monday. When a pattern is evident, parents may start to acknowledge that there could be reasons other than illness behind some of the absences. The Absence Histogram and Absence Calendar are useful tools in that they help make the parent/guardian(s) aware of the differences between good and poor attendance. During the conference, school personnel should strive to be perceived as an ally to the family--school and family both want good things for the child--and listen intently for descriptions of behaviors and characteristics that might identify the child as a particular attendance type (avoidant, disorganized, tourist). Family and school routines are discussed, strategies to cope with absences due to other than illness are agreed upon, individual roles and responsibilities are assigned, and goals are set for short-term (five-week intervention) and long-term (remainder of the school year) progress.

3. What are some other effective practices employed with the family system?

There are two additional practices which prove most effective. One practice is to encourage the parent(s) to seek support services outside the school as the family's needs are revealed. Many agencies at the local, county, state, and private levels provide support and direction that stressed families need. A second practice is to assist with developing a family support network to reinforce intervention strategies. Significant others such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, and cousins may be involved in the intervention efforts with children having attendance problems.

4. What practices are effective when parent(s) refuse to come to a conference or join a school/family allied effort to improve attendance?

If parents will not cooperate, one alternative is to counsel the child, preferably with the parent's permission. By allowing the child an opportunity to discuss the attendance problem, offering incentives, and monitoring weekly attendance, some progress may be made, although working with the child alone may be least effective in bringing about improved attendance because the child may be motivated to miss school or the family dynamics may foster poor attendance. Sometimes, however, the child is the only person available to work with at school.

C. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES: CHILD

1. How important is it to work individually with the child?

Although the attendance project focused mainly on family interventions, there are some reasons to work individually with the child. After many unsuccessful attempts to contact parent(s)/guardian(s), or their refusal to address the problem, direct intervention with the child may be the only alternative left. Periodic meetings with the child may include discussions of family dynamics, attitudes and perceptions about school, and the child's responsibility for regular attendance.

Behavioral contracts which include short and long-term goals can be negotiated with children. By allowing the child to keep a personal record of his/her attendance, a certain amount of "control" over the self and one's actions is initiated. By being successful in meeting goals, a child's self-esteem is often bolstered. Finally, a system of incentive rewards and consequences establishes the criteria that need to be met in order to be rewarded and what privileges could be lost if criteria are not met. Incentives such as stickers, pencils, crayons, and certificates or privileges such as extra computer time, running errands, or peer tutoring often prompt improvement in attendance in some children.

2. Is it effective to organize a counseling group for children with excessive absences?

Groups may be developed for children who are exhibiting excessive absences in an attempt to promote friendship, responsibility, academics, cooperation, listening skills, and good attendance. Groups may meet once a week for 30-40 minutes for 6-8 weeks. Individual goals for decreased absences should

be set as well as goals for the entire group. Parents should be informed about the group and asked to advise the school in the event that they did not want their child to participate. Refer to Appendix C for topics, activities, and procedures.

CHAPTER FIVE

CASE EXAMPLES

1. How does school avoidance develop?

Some children may start out avoiding a fearful situation (school), and may subsequently be reinforced by being allowed to stay at home. By being near a parent, having access to toys and television, and having free time, the child becomes more and more willful in his or her avoidance of school, moving from school phobia (avoiding the fearful situation) to school refusal (a willful refusal to leave home). Other children may be introverted by nature and uncomfortable in unfamiliar social situations such as entering kindergarten or changing schools. These children may also seek to avoid the uncomfortable situation. Sometimes it is the parent who encourages dependence, often in conjunction with a real or imagined weakness in the child. For instance, a child with complications at birth may be sheltered by the parent. A variation of this style is the parent who suffers real or imagined illness and keeps the child close by as a source of support. Conflict between parents can also contribute to school avoidance. The child perceives a role for him or herself to help the parents with their differences by staying at home and keeping the focus on him/her. Enmeshed family dynamics are common to these many different styles.

2. When identifying an enmeshed family system, what characteristics should be evident within the family?

Enmeshed family systems are defined as those in which family members exhibit considerable codependency--how well one is functioning determines how well others function. The school avoidant child, who may exhibit school refusal or school phobia, is characteristic of such families.

Mothers of children who are school avoidant usually exhibit unresolved dependency needs themselves. Often the mother is a single-parent, and may have been relatively older when the child was born. They may be perfectionistic, overly protective, and subject to a great deal of anxiety and guilt concerning their child (Gordon & Young, 1977; Pritchard & Ward, 1974, Sugar & Schrank, 1979)

Fathers of school avoidant children are characterized as being physically absent due to death or divorce, or psychologically absent, having little to do with the discipline and care of the child. They often provide a good material living but may be domineering, overly strict, and punitive. In two-parent

families, there may be a strain in the marriage because of a conflict in parenting styles between an overly strict or domineering father and an overly protective or indulgent mother (Gordon & Young, 1977; Sugar & Schrank, 1979).

3. How does disorganization (truancy) develop?

The disorganized child receives mixed messages about the importance of school, and they are "disorganized" with regard to school attendance. Mixed messages are most typically a function of the family's economic situation, with low income families needing to "organize" around meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Because illness is not a reason for absences, and other excuses such as religious practices usually don't apply either, this type of child is sometimes said to be the truant child. In the early years, parents may hold the child out of school perhaps because they lack appropriate clothing or supplies, or because older children are needed to care for younger siblings. In later years, truancy becomes willful with the child skipping school, for instance, by leaving the house but missing the bus. Truancy can also be due to problems with social/emotional functioning which contributes to poor interpersonal relations, ethnic or racial dissonance, or learning difficulties.

4. When identifying a disorganized family system, what characteristics should be evident in the family?

The disorganized family system is characterized by stressors in the family system that cause good school attendance to have low priority in the hierarchy of family needs. Conflict between parents, poverty in the family, and/or single-parent families are examples of such stressful situations. The family's energies and resources are organized around meeting the needs that these stressors precipitate, therefore leaving little energy to meet the need of attending school regularly. In situations where family disorganization contributes to poor school attendance, the child receives mixed messages about the importance of school

5. How does tourist behavior develop?

The tourist child typically lives in an indulgent family system. In an indulgent family the child's parents willfully take him or her out of school to participate in some other activity which they deem to be more important to the child at the time. Examples of this include extended vacations, ballet lessons, swim meets, or commercial ventures such as acting. Many instances of this type often go undocumented because the child is brought to school in the late morning or, more typically, taken out of school in the late afternoon. The child often completes most of the school day and is credited with being in attendance that day.

6. When identifying an indulgent family system, what characteristics should be evident in the family?

The parents in tourist families are usually careful to stay on good terms with the school. They insure that the child makes up all missed work or turns in extra assignments for the days he or she was absent. The parents often become active in school affairs to ingratiate themselves with school personnel. The tourist child typically maintains good grades during the elementary years and the poor attendance behavior does not present problems until the middle school or high school years when it becomes more difficult to make up missed work and/or to stay in the good graces of a greater variety of teachers.

SUPPLEMENTAL CASE STUDIES

A. DISORGANIZED TYPE

CASE 1

M.Q. was a fifth grade, 12 year-old black male who resided with his mother and older step-brother. The family lived in a low income housing development and depended on government assistance for their basic livelihood.

M.Q.'s mother related that she had experienced a difficult childhood during which she was placed in a foster home after her father died and her mother went blind. In school Mrs. Q was placed in special programs but received her high school diploma. M.Q. was an average student with special

abilities in math and computers. He attended the same elementary school for six years and was never retained, but displayed continual excessive absenteeism since kindergarten.

M.Q. was referred to the project by his teacher due to chronic absenteeism (12 absences within the first two months of school) and inappropriate behavior in the classroom and on the bus. Initial contact with his mother was difficult to establish. The family had no phone and letters sent by the intern were not answered. A home visit was therefore conducted. During the home visit, general issues of M.Q.'s attendance and behavior were discussed. Mrs. Q stated that neither of her sons helped with chores at home and that they often were disrespectful to her. She said that M.Q. often left mornings to catch the school bus but would sometimes instead roam the streets unsupervised all day. From the accumulated data (low socio-economic status, low priority on education, child's lack of responsibility, and willful truancy), M.Q. was characterized as the product of a disorganized family system

Intervention strategies included individual counseling with M.Q., counseling sessions with Mrs. Q., and consulting with school and community agency personnel. Short-term attendance goals and a long-term contract were established. M.Q. was rewarded with incentives when established goals were achieved.

The intern noticed a significant difference in M.Q.'s overall attendance. Once the intervention was started, M.Q. no longer missed one or two days weekly. In addition, no further incidents of classroom and school bus misbehavior were reported.

The most significant strategy used in working with M.Q. was counseling both the child and the mother about attendance and related issues. At a final conference, Mrs. Q agreed to continue monitoring M.Q.'s attendance and behavior. The mother also agreed to contact the middle school counselor where M.Q. would be attending next year and inform the counselor of M.Q.'s history of excessive absences.

CASE 2

P.T. was an eight year-old black male in second grade who was exhibiting excessive absence behavior as well as frequent tardies resulting from missing the bus in the morning. The school counselor and the guidance intern began working with P.T.'s family on the 90th day of school after receiving a

printout of his attendance record. A review of P.T.'s school records revealed that he had 36 absences his first year in Kindergarten when he had changed schools twice and his mother was away from the home. He was retained that year in Kindergarten. He had no further changes of school in the following years, but he had at least 15 absences each year. The classroom teacher in the current year expressed an added concern that he was out of his Ritalin medication at school.

During several home visits, the counselor and intern learned that P.T.'s mother did not work outside the home and was receiving assistance from Social Services. She had three children, an eldest daughter in an adjacent city, P.T., and a toddler, and she also cared for her two-year-old nephew who would have been placed in foster care. P.T.'s natural father was unknown. A step-father and an uncle lived in the home with P.T. All residents except the uncle slept in the one bedroom in the house. P.T.'s step-father was a mechanic and was usually out of the home by 9:00 a.m. P.T.'s mother depended solely on her husband for transportation and financial obligations. There was no phone in the home so contact by the school was made through letters and home visits.

P.T.'s mother indicated that when P.T. missed the bus her husband drove him to school and P.T. arrived by 9:30 a.m. The intern and mother worked on strategies for P.T. to arrive punctually at the bus stop each morning. These strategies included setting the alarm at night, setting out clothes before bedtime, and going to bed the same time each evening. When P.T.'s mother reported his defiance in getting out of bed in the morning, the intern decided to work directly with P.T. and set up behavior contracts. To solve the problem of getting the Ritalin prescription from the doctor, the intern contacted the doctor and asked for the prescription to be mailed to P.T.'s mother. This helped the mother because she could then walk to the pharmacist to get the prescription filled, instead of going through the difficulties of getting to the doctor's office to pick up the prescription.

Weekly meetings with P.T. began on day 96 of school and continued until day 175. Topics discussed included creating a schedule for P.T. to follow at home and self-responsibility issues. Goals were set each week to be rewarded the following week. Contact was made with P.T.'s teacher on a weekly basis to receive behavior and academic reports. Lack of adequate sleep continued to trouble P.T. and made it difficult for him to meet some of his goals (i.e. no tardies).

P.T. exhibited brief intervals of improvement for three to four weeks but then lapsed back into being late for school once or twice a week. Continual home visitation was needed to ensure that P.T.'s medicine was being administered at home and school. There was an overall improvement in P.T.'s attendance following the start of the intervention; he missed 18 days before the intervention and only 7 days after the intervention, five of which were excused absences confirmed by the family physician.

It was the intern's feeling that P.T.'s home conditions contributed to his tardiness. P.T. had no control over the one-room sleeping arrangements and this appeared to hinder him from turning short-term improvement into long-term improvement. At the last home visit, discussion was centered on the step-father's responsibilities in raising P.T. An ingredient that was important to success in this case was the teacher's participation in home visits. Relations between the school and family unit improved over the course of the intervention largely because of the willingness of P.T.'s teacher to become involved in the home visits.

CASE 3

C.B. was a 12 year-old black female in the fifth grade who was attending public school for the first time. Before this, she had been educated by her parents through home school programs in several states. C.B.'s African-American mother did not work out of the home due to cultural/religious beliefs. Her father, an African-born Chieftan, had come to America to establish his own African Christian Church. The family had no dependable income and lived at poverty level. C.B. had lived a very transient existence as the family roamed from state to state in an attempt to establish a church. Throughout the current school year, the family moved between rental homes and motels once they could not afford rent. The family value system, religious beliefs, and culture often conflicted with Wake County's school policies and C.B. appeared torn between obeying her parents or the school.

C.B.'s teacher referred her to the intern in October because of excessive unexcused absences (14) and tardies (3). In talking with C.B. and school personnel, the intern concluded that C.B. enjoyed school, desired to make friends, and wanted to come to school. The intern met with C.B. on a weekly basis and encouraged good attendance with praise and incentives. Attendance improved greatly with zero absences

in the five week intervention period, but C.B.'s attendance later deteriorated. Intern phone calls and letters to the home went unanswered. Meetings with the child seemed to help, but the parents evidently maintained different values with regard to school attendance, and the intern sought assistance from the school social worker. When faced with a possible hearing, the parents relented to a conference with the social worker. This meeting did not alleviate school concerns and a later decision was made by school personnel that court action would be initiated in August, prior to C.B.'s entrance into the sixth grade.

In summary, the intern found that C.B. was in a difficult situation where she wanted to obey both her parents and Wake County school law, and school personnel were unable to alter the parents' view. Which takes precedence, freedom of religion or school law, was a central issue that was not resolved in this intervention.

CASE 4

D.W. was a 10 year-old white male in the fourth grade, who had repeated kindergarten. He was in a self-contained class for students identified as having behavioral/emotional handicaps. D.W. had attended one school for both years of kindergarten and first grade. His placement in special education resulted in a change to his present school for grades second, third, and fourth.

D.W. was the only child of a single mother. His mother's income was such that D.W. qualified for reduced lunch at school. The mother had been referred to Social Services on more than one occasion for suspected neglect. D.W. had been referred to the Willie M. program for aggressive children but was not accepted. On days D.W. was absent from school, his maternal grandmother stayed with him while Mrs. W. worked.

D.W.'s special education teacher implored the help of the intern in getting D.W. to school more regularly. She was concerned that his absences were having an affect on both his academic achievement and his behavioral/emotional progress. A review of his attendance records showed the following number of absences for each year:

Kindergarten	41	Second grade	27
Kindergarten	24	Third grade	26
First grade	49	Fourth grade	9 (as of Day 53)

The teacher had discussed her concerns with D.W.'s mother, but there was no evidence of a change in his behavior. As there was no home phone, the intern contacted the mother at work to explain the school's concern about D.W.'s attendance. The mother declined the invitation to meet with the intern or school personnel to discuss D.W.'s situation. She stated that her son only missed school when he was sick and she did not wish to be "bothered" about this anymore. Subsequent attempts to contact the mother were unsuccessful.

After the intern conferenced with the teacher, a decision was made to proceed with a classroom intervention. The intern developed a behavior contract and provided incentives for D.W. The contract allowed D.W. to choose an incentive after five consecutive days of attendance.

The contract was initially successful. D.W. attended school every day for three weeks after the contract was written. After that, however, his attendance began to decline. In the 65 days prior to the contract, he missed 9 days, and then had only one absence during the five week intervention phase; however, in the 65 days after the intervention phase, he missed 23 days. Further contact with D.W.'s teacher revealed that his attendance, attitude, and behavior had not improved.

D.W. appeared to benefit from the individual attention of the intern, at least over the period of the intervention, and he would be a good candidate for a Partner or Big Brother program. Without mother's involvement and support, however, long-term changes would not be forthcoming. The mother's resistance to intervention efforts was a critical factor that hindered the intervention.

CASE 5

H.J. was a six year-old white male in kindergarten. He had 30 absences the previous year in kindergarten and was retained. H.J. was brought to the attention of the intern at the beginning of the school year. His teacher had been sending him home for what she indicated were sickness-like symptoms, such as a runny nose, dried mucus on his face, and dirty fingernails. She noted that instead of using tissue, he would wipe his nose with his hands or shirt sleeves and wipe this on his teacher or peers. The teacher also described additional hygiene problems such as pronounced problems with dandruff. The teacher deemed such poor hygiene socially unacceptable and not to be tolerated in the school; therefore, she would send him home.

The intern had several meetings with the parents and learned that H.J.'s father worked different shifts for 10 to 12 hours per day; his mother was legally blind and worked in the home. When Mr. J. was home he reportedly spent most of his time resting in bed because he was obese. H.J. had two older sisters, one of which lived in the home. His parents were very cooperative and acknowledged the importance of regular school attendance but also indicated that they felt that H.J.'s absences were due to the school. Mrs. J stated that she had sent H.J. to school every day the previous year except for a few days when he was sick with the flu. She explained that most absences were because the teacher sent him home due to a runny nose, etc.

H.J.'s family had a host of needs but also presented some strengths. On occasions when the school sent H.J. home, the mother indicated that she often took him to the doctor. She also explained that he sometimes needed medication for allergies and Mrs. J. administered this medication when the school notified her of this problem. Mrs. J. did acknowledge that H.J. might leave for school with a dirty face because of her inability to see or his not liking to use tissues.

An important part of the intervention implemented in this case involved developing a plan for the school to follow that redefined reasons for when H.J. would be sent home. Specific signs and conditions of illness were described and these needed to be present before H.J. could be sent home; these signs did not include conditions such as a runny nose, dirty face, or dirty fingernails. If these signs or conditions were not present, H.J. would stay at school, and his teacher could send a note home to his mother if she felt that his appearance or behavior were unacceptable. In the home, a plan was developed for the father and older sister to help with getting H.J. ready for school. H.J. showed a considerable improvement in attendance, as well as appearance once these plans were implemented.

While these same results may have been obtained by the teacher and parent alone, the success of this case may be due in part to the role played by the guidance intern. The interest that the intern demonstrated on behalf of the family through home visits and school conferences was important in gaining the family's support. The "mediator" role adopted by the intern facilitated communication and diffused possible conflicts between the family and school.

B. SCHOOL AVOIDANT TYPE

CASE 1

A.P. was a 10 year-old black male in fifth grade. He lived with his single mother and younger brother. His family's income was sufficient such that he did not receive free or reduced lunch benefits at school.

A.P. had attended the same school since kindergarten. His CAT scores were below average (Total Battery at the 16th percentile in third grade and the 24th percentile in the fourth grade), but he had not been referred for evaluation for exceptional services.

The intern's review of the school's attendance data for the previous year initially drew attention to A.P. as a student with excessive absences. Further investigation of A.P.'s attendance records revealed the following history of absences:

Kindergarten	56	Second grade	6
First grade	36	Third grade	9
		Fourth grade	20

The intern was planning to conduct a counseling group for fifth grade students which focused on preparing for middle school with a special emphasis on attendance. The possibility of A.P. participating in this group was discussed with the school counselor and the counselor felt that he would make a good contribution to the group.

Once permission was obtained from A.P.'s mother, A.P. was invited to participate in the group. He appeared interested and agreed to come. The group met six times over the course of six weeks, and covered such topics as responsibility, listening skills, study skills, gaining social and academic confidence, and school attendance (Reference Appendix C). Individual and group attendance goals were established, and rewards were given for meeting these goals. A.P. missed one day during that period. Prior to the beginning of the group he had missed six days of school, and in the six weeks following the group he missed only two days. A.P. was an active participant in the group, and he spoke of the importance of regular attendance, especially in middle school. Although A.P. needs continued support in improving his attendance, it appeared that this intervention was successful in improving A.P.'s awareness and behavior with regard to school attendance.

CASE 2

M.R. was an eleven year-old white male in fifth grade. He lived at home with his mother and college-aged sister. His parents were divorced and M.R. had regular weekly visits with his father who lived nearby. The family's socioeconomic status was considered to be upper middle-class.

M.R. was brought to the intern's attention by school personnel who reported that he regurgitated every Monday morning and would request that his father be called to take him home. Contact with Mrs. R. provided further information that M.R. did this intentionally and even bragged to friends that he could regurgitate and be sent home. On several occasions M.R. also left school without the permission of school personnel and once attempted to skip school. M.R.'s attendance records showed an increase in absences through his school years:

Kindergarten	2	Third grade	7
First grade	9	Fourth grade	15
Second grade	7	Fifth grade	20 (as of Start Date)

During the current year, M.R. had accumulated 19 absences by the time 13 weeks of school remained. Intervention was begun at this time, and the intern scheduled two conferences that included M.R.'s parents, the intern, the project director, and the school principal; M.R. was involved in the second conference. M.R. actively participated in this conference which was being videotaped, acknowledged that he could make himself regurgitate, and might have been persuaded to demonstrate before the group had not the others elected to accept his word on faith.

A plan was developed to reduce miscommunication between the two parents and between the parents and school, and to involve the parents, the school, and M.R. in creating consequences for M.R. if he continued to regurgitate purposefully. The plan also included eliminating positive reinforcement that M.R. was receiving at home when he left school early, such as extra attention, more time with his father, and a withdrawal from school. The plan outlined negative consequences M.R. would receive for regurgitating deliberately which included helping to clean up the mess and detention at school on Saturday mornings which would effectively take time away from his time with his father.

M.R. later had two incidents that occurred in the principal's office in which he appeared to test the limits. The first incident involved his managing to regurgitate five times in the office in the presence of the principal. The principal kept a wastebasket handy and notified the parents but otherwise kept M.R. at school. A second incident was that M.R. complained of having been stuck with a pencil. After realizing that he was going to be kept in school unless there was a legitimate illness, M.R. ceased all attempts at regurgitation and missed only one day of school for the following 13 weeks. He expressed pride with his accomplishments in the end of the year.

Key elements in the success of this intervention were the intern's recognition that M.R.'s absences had a pattern (most being on Monday), the cooperation among school personnel and the two parents, the principal's determination to stay the course when M.R. tested the limits, and the confidence that all had in understanding the interplay of family systems dynamics and school avoidant behavior.

CASE 3

P.X. was a nine year-old, white male, fourth grade student. He lived with his mother and three older sisters. Due to an excessive number of sporadic absences (17 by January), P.X. was referred to the guidance intern by his classroom teacher.

Frequent complaints of headaches, stomach problems and his overall timid behavior in school suggested that P. X. was exhibiting symptoms of school avoidance. A conference was held with P.X.'s mother during which certain familial facts were disclosed. Mrs.X. was recently separated from an abusive, unfaithful husband and was in counseling at a local Women's Center. In addition, she was unemployed due to a severe back injury and was expending all her energy in meeting the family's basic needs. Mrs.X. explained that her estranged husband continually phoned, asking her for reconciliation. This placed enormous pressure and tension on the family, since all family members feared the abusive tendencies of the father and did not want him to return. Mrs.X. stated that every time the father phoned or tried to visit, P.X. would become nervous, physically ill, and cling to his mother. The intern and Mrs.X. decided that counseling for P.X. was immediately needed.

The intern met with P.X. on three occasions. The intern's concern, interest and support were offered, attendance issues were discussed, and incentives for improved attendance in the form of praise and tokens were awarded. In addition, P.X. voluntarily joined a divorce group at school which was led by the school counselor.

During counseling, enormous strides were made in attendance and emotional stability. Contact with his mother and teacher indicated that P.X. was more relaxed in school and at home, he was making new friends, his attendance was better, and his academics had improved. In late March, P.X. announced that his family had lost their mobile home site and would be moving soon. He expressed sadness and anger over the impending move, stated that he was happy in this school, and said that he did not want to attend a new school.

The intern contacted both the mother and the new school personnel after the family move. An initial report in late April stated that P.X. was attending school daily and appeared to be adjusting; however, by mid-May, P.X. returned to his school avoidant behaviors and refused to go to school. In the last report, the assistant principal, teacher, and counselor were working with P.X. on his adjustment and attendance. His mother also initiated counseling for the entire family.

From the intern's perspective, the turning point for P.X. was the counseling that he received. It provided a means for him to express many repressed emotions and to feel support from the school system. Unfortunately, the move to a new town and school upset much of the progress P.X. had made.

CASE 4

G.M. was a 9 year-old black female in the fourth grade. She was the youngest of five children with an age gap of 15 years between G.M. and the next older sibling. G.M.'s mother was a homemaker and her father worked for the town in which they lived. G.M. had the following attendance record:

Kindergarten	26	Third grade	17
First grade	23	Fourth grade	13
Second grade	17		

During the first year of the project a brief intervention had been made with G.M.'s family but she still continued to exhibit excessive absences. During the second year, another intervention was started

with a conference with G.M.'s teacher. Tardiness was the initial complaint from the teacher, and she saw G.M.'s tardiness as a lack of respect for authority. The intern next scheduled a conference with Mrs. M. in an effort to decrease absences and tardies. School avoidant behaviors were identified and discussed. Weekly meetings were held between G.M. and the intern during which short-term goals and possible rewards were established. Nearing mid-year, G.M. became hostile and unwilling to participate in attempts to decrease absences or tardies. Another conference was scheduled that included the intern, G.M.'s teacher (who was an interim) and G.M.'s father. The efforts that had been made were discussed with Mr. M. With the support of the assistant principal, it was decided that G.M. would have to stay after school in detention for the time that she missed in the mornings. This procedure was beneficial and G.M. was tardy only two times after the installment of the detention plan.

From phone calls and conferences with this family, it was evident that values about school rules and promptness were not highly regarded. G.M.'s older brothers had also been absent and tardy frequently during the primary grades. Mrs. M. appeared to suffer from a lack of self-confidence and it was the intern's feeling that she contributed to G.M.'s frequent absences, possibly to have someone at home who needed her. In order to be successful with this case, consequences rather than incentives seemed to instill the development of appropriate school behaviors, but work would still need to be done with the family to better secure long-term improvement.

CASE 5

T.Y. was an 11 year-old white female in the fourth grade. She had attended the same school since Kindergarten and her attendance history was as follows:

Kindergarten	21	Second grade	16
Kindergarten	15	Third grade	18
First grade	17	Fourth grade	15

Attempts for conferences with the parents made by the intern the first year of the project were unsuccessful and no intervention was started that year, although T.Y. was tested for Learning Disabilities because her mother was concerned with her poor academic progress. In first grade, T.Y. was diagnosed

with dyslexia, and the mother felt that she was avoiding school during the third grade because of her academic struggles, but she did not feel that this was the case anymore in fourth grade.

Because absences were still a concern in fourth grade, the intern began weekly meetings with T.Y. to set goals for improved attendance. Family issues and problems at school were also discussed in these meetings. After a couple of weeks and perfect attendance, T.Y. again exhibited several absences. T.Y. appeared to be suffering from anxiety headaches and a nervous stomach about upcoming standardized testing, and T.Y.'s mother was letting her stay at home. Mrs. Y. would also take T.Y. to work with her rather than send her to school on days when she said the child wasn't feeling well.

While the school's perspective was that the mother and T.Y. were exhibiting co-dependent behavior, the parents' perspective was that they did not want to subject T.Y. to the stress of having to go to school when she wasn't feeling well. Conversations with the mother were inconclusive, and the father called the project director at one point to complain that his wife was being bothered about sending T.Y. to school when she was sick. Following this call, a meeting with both parents at the school seemed to impress them that the school was concerned for the child's academic success just as they were and they responded to encouragement to be more persuasive with T.Y. about going to school.

The intern continued to work with T.Y. on attendance and related topics such as relaxation techniques, test-taking strategies, and preparing for new situations. T.Y.'s attendance remarkably improved the second half of the year, and his parents expressed more positive attitudes toward school. While T.Y. needs continued support when challenged by new situations and/or her dyslexia, this intervention was as successful in improving not only T.Y.'s attendance but also her attitude toward the school environment.

CASE 6

When working with two third grade boys, who were best friends, successful interventions were combined by having the two work together. L.L. was a 9 year-old boy who lived in a white middle class home. He lived with both parents and two younger sisters. L.L. was in the Academically Gifted program. L.L. had had 13 absences in first grade and 23 in second grade. Intervention began with 14 weeks

remaining in third grade when L.L. had accumulated 14 absences, nine of which were on Mondays or Fridays. Questioned about the this pattern, L.L. had admitted that these days were less relevant to him.

S.H. was L.L.'s best friend. He lived in a single-parent home where there was little income and minimal supervision. S.H. had witnessed his father abuse his mother for years before a separation one year ago. These dynamics appeared to contribute to S.H.'s many absences, tardies, and working below his full potential (S.H. was an intelligent child with high OLSAT scores and CAT scores in the 91st percentile). His attendance history was as follows:

Kindergarten	30
First grade	36
Second grade	21

By the time there were 14 weeks of school remaining in the third grade, S.H. had accumulated 18 absences and 31 tardies. Initial interventions on behalf of the two children began with each mother separately.

Mrs. L. seemed unaware that L.L.'s absences were above normal or a cause for concern since his grades were so good. Not until it was pointed out that he was missing more days than 95% of students did she become concerned with the situation. After this, Mrs. L. was very supportive of the program and encouraged both boys to meet their goals. Mrs. H. had many more concerns to work on, and the intern suggested contact with Interact, a support program for victims of domestic violence, to help her and her children deal with and understand the many issues they were facing. Several plans also were developed that would include a more appropriate routine within the home. For instance, S.H. needed a scheduled bedtime, homework time, and consistent morning routine. Because many of S.H.'s tardies were because no one woke him or drove him to school, the new plan included S.H. using his own alarm clock and walking to school.

The boys each made a contract that included their goals. They agreed to phone each other in the morning and meet at a mutual corner so they could walk to school together. They met with the intern weekly and received incentives for meeting goals.

L.L. and S.H. later both missed four days one week due to a stomach virus that they both contracted. After this, L.L. did not miss any other days. S.H. missed an additional three days and had

two tardies near the end of the year. Having the boys work together was an important factor contributing to the success in both cases. In particular, Mrs. L.'s involvement and encouragement helped S.H. as well as her own son.

CASE 7

This case example, involving work with the whole family system, included a weekly group session with the four siblings and frequent contact and support for the mother. The family consisted of both biological parents and five children. Four of the children were in the school and the fifth was one year of age. The four children in school had excessive tardies although they resided only 1/2 block from the school. With 15 weeks of school remaining the children had accumulated tardies as follow:

CHILD	GRADE	SEX	TARDIES
W.M.	Fifth	Male	48
K.M.	Fourth	Female	47
M.M.	Second	Male	24
C.M.	Kindergarten	Male	50

The children came to the intern's attention when reviewing attendance records. Although they didn't have many absences, excessive tardiness is an indication of school avoidant behavior and may later develop into absences. When discussing this issue with the teachers it was apparent that this was causing disturbances in the classroom and was an annoyance to teachers and students which developed into negative attitudes from teachers and peers toward the children. Teachers had requested that the family improve the situation but there was little else done due to a lack of policy regarding tardiness.

The intern met with the four children in a group each week for about 20 minutes. Each child had a goal card on which the teacher placed a sticker for each day that the child was on time. At the meetings, the intern checked the cards and offered incentives if the children were on time each day. The intern continuously stressed the importance of being in school and emphasized to the children that it was their responsibility to get to school on time. The intern also sometimes saw the children individually, and meetings were scheduled one half hour before school started so that the children would not miss class or be late; this again emphasized the importance of not missing class time.

The intern had frequent contact with the mother and several conferences. Together, the intern and mother developed structured routines for morning, after school, and night times which included limiting television time and setting appropriate bed times. These schedules provided some consistency to the children and improved upon poor habits regarding television and bed time that contributed to the tardiness.

There was considerable improvement with all children, and the last 15 weeks of school the children accumulated tardies as follow:

W.M.	9
K.M.	3
M.M.	2
C.M.	5

The children were all very proud of their accomplishments. All indicated that it felt good to be on time and noted that their teachers were also proud of them. This program improved their self-esteem and encouraged the children to take responsibility for their own behaviors.

This family system was a nurturing one but household routines were unstructured and chaotic. The mother had extreme difficulty setting appropriate schedules. Mrs. M. did improve somewhat on these issues but the intern found the most helpful strategy to be developing schedules and plans with the children.

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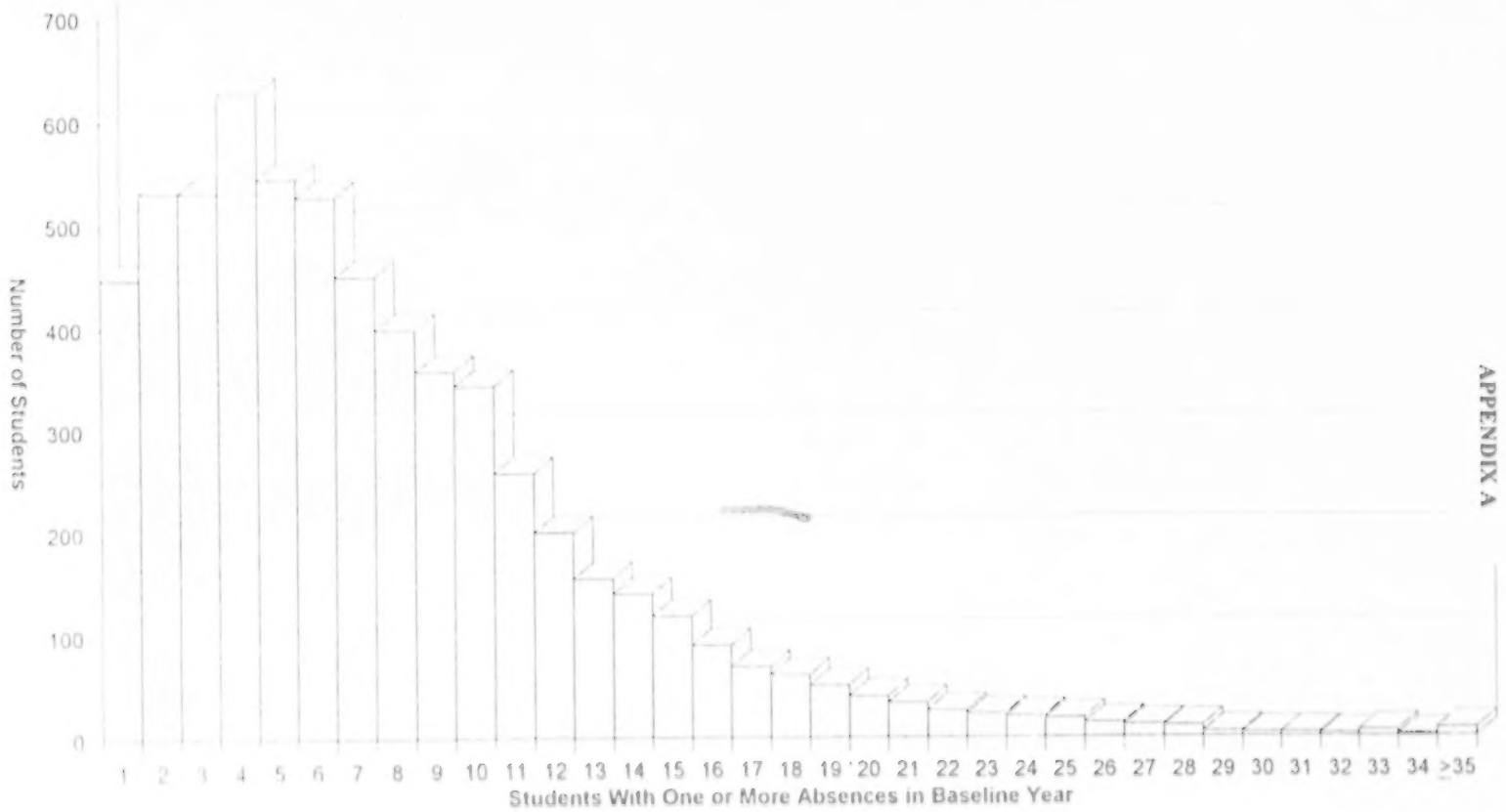
APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

Number of Students = 6137

Number of Schools = 12

APPENDIX B

ABSENCE CALENDAR

1991/1992

A26	1	N 4	48	J13	85	M23	133	J 1	176
A27	2	N 5	49	J14	86	M24	134	J 2	177
A28	3	N 6	50	J15	87	M25	135	J 3	178
A29	4	N 7	51	J16	88	M26	136	J 4	179
A30	5	N 8	52	J17	89	M27	•	J 5	180
S 2	•	N11	•	J20	•	M30	•		
S 3	6	N12	53	J21	90	M31	•		
S 4	7	N13	54	J22	91	A 1	•		
S 5	8	N14	55	J23	92	A 2	•		
S 6	9	N15	56	J24	93	A 3	•		
S 9	10	N18	57	J27	•	A 6	137		
S10	11	N19	58	J28	94	A 7	138		
S11	12	N20	59	J29	95	A 8	139		
S12	13	N21	60	J30	96	A 9	140		
S13	14	N22	61	J31	97	A10	141		
S16	15	N25	62	F 3	98	A13	142		
S17	16	N26	63	F 4	99	A14	143		
S17	17	N27	64	F 5	100	A15	144		
S18	18	N28	•	F 6	101	A16	145		
S19	19	N29	•	F 7	102	A17	•		
S23	20	D 2	65	F10	103	A20	146		
S24	21	D 3	66	F11	104	A21	147		
S25	22	D 4	67	F12	105	A22	148		
S26	23	D 5	68	F13	106	A23	149		
S27	•	D 6	69	F14	107	A24	150		
S30	24	D 9	70	F17	108	A27	151		
O 1	25	D10	71	F18	109	A28	152		
O 2	26	D11	72	F19	110	A29	153		
O 3	27	D12	73	F20	111	A30	154		
O 4	28	D13	74	F21	112	M 1	155		
O 7	29	D16	75	F24	113	M 4	156		
O 8	30	D17	76	F25	114	M 5	157		
O 9	31	D18	77	F26	115	M 6	158		
O10	32	D19	78	F27	116	M 7	59		
O11	33	D20	79	F28	117	M 8	160		
O14	34	D23	•	M 2	118	M11	161		
O15	35	D24	•	M 3	119	M12	162		
O16	36	D25	•	M 4	120	M13	163		
O17	37	D26	•	M 5	121	M14	164		
O18	38	D27	•	M 6	122	M15	165		
O21	39	D30	•	M 9	123	M18	166		
O22	40	D31	•	M10	124	M19	167		
O23	41	J 1	•	M11	125	M20	168		
O24	42	J 2	•	M12	126	M21	169		
O25	43	J 3	•	M13	127	M22	170		
O28	44	J 6	80	M16	128	M25	171		
O29	45	J 7	81	M17	129	M26	172		
O30	46	J 8	82	M18	130	M27	173		
O31	47	J 9	83	M19	131	M28	174		
N 1	•	J10	84	M20	132	M29	175		

1992/1993

A24	1	N 2	48	J11	85	M22	133	M31	•
A25	2	N 3	49	J12	86	M23	134	J 1	177
A26	3	N 4	50	J13	87	M24	135	J 2	178
A27	4	N 5	51	J14	88	M25	136	J 3	179
A28	5	N 6	52	J15	89	M26	•	J 4	180
A31	6	N 9	53	J18	•	M29	137		
S 1	7	N10	54	J19	•	M30	138		
S 2	8	N11	•	J20	90	M31	139		
S 3	9	N12	55	J21	91	A 1	140		
S 4	10	N13	56	J22	92	A 2	141		
S 7	•	N16	57	J25	93	A 5	•		
S 8	11	N17	58	J26	94	A 6	•		
S 9	12	N18	59	J27	95	A 7	•		
S10	13	N19	60	J28	96	A 8	•		
S11	14	N20	61	J29	97	A 9	•		
S14	15	N23	62	F 1	98	A12	142		
S15	16	N24	63	F 2	99	A13	143		
S16	17	N25	64	F 3	100	A14	144		
S17	18	N26	•	F 4	101	A15	145		
S18	19	N27	•	F 5	102	A16	146		
S21	20	N30	65	F 8	103	A19	147		
S22	21	D 1	66	F 9	104	A20	148		
S23	22	D 2	67	F10	105	A21	149		
S24	23	D3	68	F11	106	A22	150		
S25	24	D4	69	F12	107	A23	151		
S28	•	D 7	70	F15	108	A26	152		
S29	25	D 8	71	F16	109	A27	153		
S30	26	D 9	72	F17	110	A28	154		
O 1	27	D10	73	F18	111	A29	155		
O 2	28	D11	74	F19	112	A30	156		
O 5	29	D14	75	F22	113	M 3	157		
O 6	30	D15	76	F23	114	M 4	158		
O 7	31	D16	77	F24	115	M 5	159		
O 8	32	D17	78	F25	116	M 6	160		
O 9	33	D18	79	F26	117	M 7	161		
O12	34	D21	•	M 1	118	M10	162		
O13	35	D22	•	M 2	119	M11	163		
O14	36	D23	•	M 3	120	M12	164		
O15	37	D24	•	M 4	121	M13	165		
O16	38	D25	•	M 5	122	M14	166		
O19	39	D28	•	M 8	123	M17	167		
O20	40	D29	•	M 9	124	M18	168		
O21	41	D30	•	M10	125	M19	169		
O22	42	D31	•	M11	126	M20	170		
O23	•	J 1	•	M12	127	M21	171		
O26	43	J 4	80	M15	128	M24	172		
O27	44	J 5	81	M16	129	M25	173		
O28	45	J 6	82	M17	130	M26	174		
O29	46	J 7	83	M18	131	M27	175		
O30	47	J 8	84	M19	132	M28	176		

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APPENDIX C

The following is an outline of activities that were used in group counseling sessions with students. Six sessions of approximately 45 minutes each were planned.

SESSION 1

Activity A - Introductions

Objectives are to give students an opportunity to meet the other participants in the group and establish a comfort zone among group members.

1. Leader introduces self to group
2. Students fill out index cards to include the following information:
    a. Name
    b. Favorite subject/activity in school
    c. "One thing I like to do outside school"
    c. "One reason I think school is important"

Activity B - Establish Ground Rules

Objectives are to establish guidelines in order to encourage participation and to reduce disruptive behaviors among group members.

1. Students and leader brainstorm group rules; some examples include:
    a. You must come to group sessions
    b. Be respectful of others in the group; no name-calling and only one person talks at a time
    c. Participate and encourage others to participate
    d. Confidentiality

Activity C - Focus on Attendance

Objectives are to allow participants a chance to see that other students experience attendance difficulties, and to assist participants to set reasonable goals for the group and individual members.

1. Discuss the importance of attendance
2. Set goals for individual members
3. Set a goal for the group
4. Discuss incentives for meeting individual and group goals.

SESSION 2

Activity A - Attendance Check

Objectives are to demonstrate that attendance will be closely monitored, keep track of any improvements or declines in attendance, and offer incentives as appropriate.

1. Using a visual system, such as the Absence Calendar, explain how students' attendance will be recorded and monitored
2. Check attendance since last session and make entries on visual record

Activity B - Something Positive Happened At School

Objectives are to bolster self-esteem and reinforce positive attitudes toward school.

1. Have students describe or write down something good that happened to them at school since the last session

Activity C - Discuss Responsibility

Objectives are to make students aware of what responsible behavior is and how it pertains to attendance.

1. Ask students, "What is being responsible?" Look for responses such as follow:
    a. Getting ready for school
    c. Being present and on time
    b. Completing assignments
2. Contrast examples of responsible and irresponsible behaviors
3. Emphasize relationship between responsibility and being happy and successful in school

SESSION 3

Activity A - Attendance Check (as above)

Activity B - Discuss Listening

Objectives are to describe good listening behaviors, make students aware of their importance to success in school, and provide practice in listening skills.

1. Ask questions such as follow:
    a. How can we tell if someone is listening?
    b. Why is listening important in school?
    c. How do you show (i.e., posture) that you are listening?
2. Use acronym TLQR to reinforce memory for good study habits
    a. T - Tune in
    b. L - Listen
    c. Q - Question
    d. R - Review

Activity C - Practice Listening Techniques

Objectives are to provide students opportunity to use listening skills that will benefit them in the classroom.

1. Have the students interview each other and report what they learn to the group

SESSION 4

Activity A - Attendance Check (as above)

Activity B - Discuss Homework

Objectives are to describe the importance of homework for school success, and to indicate how responsibility and listening relate to completing homework satisfactorily

1. Question how listening in school is important to completing homework at home
2. Question what responsibilities students must master in order to complete homework
3. Question how doing homework benefits school performance

Activity C - Discuss class behavior

Objectives are to reinforce classroom behavior and performance.

1. Question what topics/classes the student is most/least comfortable/confidant with
2. Discuss how students can improve in situations where they are not comfortable/confidant; look for responses consistent with TLQR:
    a. Be there and show interest
    b. Demonstrate listening behaviors
    c. Ask questions and seek help when uncertain
    c. Take extra time to practice, review, and check work
3. Develop notions of friendship and how friends can support or detract from school performance

SESSION 5

Activity A - Attendance Check (as above)

Activity B - Discuss Attendance

Objectives are to remind students of progress toward meeting individual and group goals, and to begin making future plans for when the group no longer meets.

1. Discuss consequences of poor attendance
2. Discuss valid and invalid reasons for being absent
3. Discuss standards of good attendance (i.e., 1 absence per month or less, on average); use Absence Histogram and Absence Calendar as visual aids
4. Encourage students to share attendance records and ideas for each to continue making improvements

Activity C - Individual Meetings

Objectives are to reinforce individual plans for improving attendance.

1. Allow time to individually meet with each child this day

SESSION 6

Activity A - Attendance Check (as above)

Activity B - Review

Objectives are to review the course of the group program, including original reason for getting together, important discussion topics, and significant events over the period of meeting together; emphasize how these all relate to attendance.

Activity C - Group Incentive

Objectives are to assess how well the group did with meeting its group goal and to participate in the incentive as appropriate.

Activity D - Individual Incentive

Objectives are to assess how well each child met individual goals and to reinforce with incentive as appropriate; schedule individual time for this activity.